

TRANSGRESSION

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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TRÜBNER AND CO., 1876

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HIS MAJESTY'S GREATEST SUBJECT
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TRANSGRESSION

BY

S. S. THORBURN

BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE

AUTHOR OF "ASIATIC NEIGHBOURS," "HIS MAJESTY'S GREATEST
SUBJECT," ETC., ETC

"To resist temptation that is virtue. . . . Of those born of woman few are tempted."—*Sermons by J. Hooker*

"Husbands love your wives . . . wives submit yourselves to your husbands."—*St. Paul quoted in the Marriage Service*

"With the Afghans successful treachery is the whole art of war."—*Major-General Sir Atwell Pottinger, K.C.B.*

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Transgression

Chapter I

INTRODUCES THE UNHEROIC HERO

GEORGE FITZHUGH, an Indian Staff Corps man, though not yet forty, was already a Brevet-Lieutenant-Colonel, a C.B., and a second-class Resident in charge of the wild frontier district known as Pechistan.

Amongst the officers in the graded list of the Foreign Office he had long been proverbial for his luck. His pals called him with alliterative familiarity "Fitz the Fortunate"; detractors, envious of his leaping fortunes, "Fitz the Bounder," a designedly dubious compliment.

When he got that Pechistan appointment, about two years before this story opens, budding politcials

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and fire-eating subalterns of his acquaintance were jubilant ; complications in the affairs of Pechistan, our latest acquisition on the N.W. Frontier of India, would soon arise, and necessitate a military expedition on a large scale, which would be followed by the usual consequences, a medal or extra clasp for the many, special honours for the few, including Knighthood for the General and Chief Political, the annexation of more hills and valleys, the creation of a dozen new appointments at least, and the sowing of the seed for a crop of further "little wars."

But in Indian foreign affairs the ambitious Political proposes, and the Viceroy of the day, under guidance from the party in power at home, disposes, and a change of Viceroy often involves a change of policy. Had the late Viceroy retained office a year longer, Colonel Fitzhugh might have gained his coveted distinction, and the aspirations of some of his friends might have been gratified.

Happily for the finances of India, but unhappily for the immediate prospects of Colonel Fitzhugh and his friends, a change of Government at home brought about a reversal of the forward-all-round policy in India.

The then Viceroy resigned in disgust, and was replaced by a successor pledged to peace and retrenchment. As a consequence the political barometer along our N.W. Frontier rose from "stormy" to "set-fair." Naturally the new Viceroy abominated the Imperialist ways of his

predecessor, whose policy had been "expansion and damn expense."

In furtherance of that principle of governance the late Viceroy had carried through half a dozen "little wars" to successful issues, had extended our "sphere of influence," as the phrase is, over new highlands with an aggregate area larger than that of Great Britain and Ireland, a population as brave, numerous, and fanatical as that of Afghanistan proper, and a soil as unproductive as that of Biluchistan or the Russian province of Trans-Caspia. He had further "pacified" the unruly inhabitants of our new acquisition by subsidizing every hill-robber, who called himself a chief, and by studding the so-called trade-routes in their hills with forts and garrisons.¹

But no Government can wage even "little wars" or establish British influence over wild hill-men without vast expenditure; hence the blessings of an extended civilization, and potential, but rarely actual, new markets for our trade, had already cost the Indian tax-payers millions, and promised to permanently increase the annual military charges by half a million sterling at least. This additional burden would, however, it was asserted, disappear in a few years, as the late Viceroy had assured the Secretary of State for India it was only temporary. His Excellency intended shortly to replace soldiers by military police—a distinction almost without a difference much affected by Imperialist Viceroys, and invariably accepted as

¹ See Appendix, Note 1.

military retrenchment by the Opposition in Parliament at home.

It is a device which curiously illustrates human ignorance or gullibility. Every attempt to increase the Indian army is jealously watched, and condemned by those representatives of public opinion who are at the time in opposition to the Government of the day, but if the new battalions are dubbed police, no critic objects ; no critic notices even that by this trick—it deserves no higher designation—the prescribed proportion between the white and brown constituents of the forces of the Crown in India is upset.

To Colonel Fitzhugh, Resident in Pechistan, his prospects were now gloomy, for in ordinary course he would be promoted before the new Viceroy's term of office would expire, and promotion would involve translation to a fat first-class Residency in the interior of India, in which he would vegetate in dignified oblivion until retirement.

To the frontier political and soldier, inaction is inglorious ease, a war or punitive expedition the one road to advancement. Thus Colonel Fitzhugh naturally detested the new policy ; it was mean, pusillanimous, retrograde, un-English, and besides, he had a personal grievance.

Nine months previously he had, as he considered, rescued the Government, by peaceful means, from a difficulty which, under the late Viceroy, would have been solved by a punitive expedition. True, his bill was considerable, but the money had been well laid out, and by spending

a couple of lakhs he had saved Government an outlay of twenty. Instead of being rewarded—and many an honour has been given for a smaller or even purely ornamental service—he had been informed that the complications had been due to his own disregard of standing instructions ; and as to his political bill, he was coldly cautioned to be less extravagant in future. A deputation of tribal chieftains should not, as a rule, exceed fifteen individuals, whereas he had received and fed several hundreds as guests of the State : moreover, a daily allowance of half a sheep per man was wasteful and inadmissible, being fifteen times the meat-ration sanctioned for the beef-fed British soldier.

The letter conveying this snubbing was marked "confidential," and signed by the Foreign Secretary, though probably written by one of his many clever assistants. There it lay open on Colonel Fitzhugh's office table. "Pshaw!" he thought as he slipped it under his blotting pad ; "this new cheese-paring departure is intolerable. I am to explain paltry items of account, am I ? Well, I never could take care of my own money, and I suppose I have been a bit careless of that of the Sarkar. I expect that conceited little beggar, my Munshi, Fazl Ali, has made some blunder. He is honest as men of his class go, I daresay ; but if I catch him seriously tripping, I'll sack him."

Having let off steam, he sat down and coolly reviewed the situation. He would order Fazl Ali to prepare a detailed account, and classify charges clearly under major and minor heads. As he

arrived at that sensible conclusion, he saw a communication from Messrs. Harington & Co., jewellers, Calcutta, lying on his table. He took it up and glanced at it.

The firm respectfully declined to despatch the diamond crescent which he had ordered, until they received the money for it—two thousand rupees. They regretted having to impose such a condition on an old and esteemed client, but as in some cases they had recently found a difficulty in recovering payment for articles of considerable value, when delivered before receipt of a cheque, their directors had no course open but to adopt the rule of payment with order.

"Very awkward," thought the Resident ; "Mary must have her birthday present, and there is no time to arrange with a more accommodating firm. As to how my accounts stand, I have not the least idea. I ought, I suppose, to have a balance at credit."

His Munshi, Fazl Ali, the superintendent of his vernacular office, kept his private accounts as well as those of the Agency, there being no bank at Mankiala, as the head-quarter station of the Agency was called.

In his present dilemma, all he could do was to send for Fazl Ali, and cause him to remit money to Calcutta.

He struck his call-bell, and immediately an orderly appeared.

"Tell Fazl Ali to come at two sharp, and bring my accounts with him," he said, frowning at the

poor man, as if he were the inventor of troublesome accounts.

Having given the order, he muttered to himself, "There, that's done," dismissed the disagreeable side of the subject from his mind, and pictured to himself his wife's delight upon opening the case and seeing his handsome gift. In the pleasures of anticipation his face resumed its accustomed serenity.

Colonel Fitzhugh was a big, handsome man, whose generally frank, open countenance was impressed with a strange duality of expression. About his rather sensual mouth and brown sympathetic eyes a good-natured smile seemed ever contending for mastery with some sinister shadow, which showed itself now and again furtively, evanescently. This lurking devil, like an evil familiar, was usually in hiding, but sometimes crept forth and overspread the features. It had dominated the man's whole being each time his deep-set eyes had rested on the Government letter censuring him, but had disappeared as soon as the cause for anger had been, for the moment, put out of sight, and the mind had overcome its impatience of accounts by ordering the attendance of Fazl Ali.

Where pen and paper were concerned, he was, like Mr. Rhodes, distinctly an indolent man, and hated detail, in general, and accounts, of any kind, in particular. On occasion he was capable of great and sustained exertion. His weaknesses were a love of display, and, though married to a

wife whom he adored, a too great admiration for the fair sex.

As a bachelor he had never got into serious mischief with women, because for years he had been serving on the N.W. Frontier where ladies are few, and those few as a rule devoted wives and mothers; hence he had never been sufficiently tempted.

As a married man he ought theoretically to have been above temptation; he had a beautiful wife, who was the mother of a beautiful boy, and as such they satisfied his fastidious eye; but, alas! his soul was still athirst, and cried out for more than wife or child gave him. In an earthly paradise it is frequently so. In few households is there peace, perfect peace, even though no serpent may yet have entered the domestic Eden—and that was the case in Colonel Fitzhugh's Eden.

While on furlough, nearly four years before this particular morning, he ran down to Cornwall to pay a duty visit to his wealthy uncle, David Fitzhugh, whose heir-presumptive his father was. The old gentleman had inherited a fine estate, and spent most of his life on it. Down in the village a widow, named Penberthy, with her only child, Mary, had for many years rented from Squire Fitzhugh, of Ashley Grange, a pretty retreat called Rose Cottage. The child's father and the Squire had been college chums, and their friendship had continued until death severed it. Thus, naturally, the inmates of the cottage and

the owner of the Grange were very intimate, and, naturally also, during Colonel Fitzhugh's visit he saw a great deal of the beautiful Miss Penberthy.

With him it was a case of "*veni, vidi, vici.*" He proposed, and married Miss Penberthy within three months of their first meeting. It could not well have been otherwise.

When a gallant soldier from the East appears in an old-world neighbourhood, seeking rest and recreation after a period of strife and turmoil on the N.W. Frontier of India, and in this peaceful retreat beholds in a woman,—

“a soft landscape of mild earth,
Where all is calm and harmony and quiet,”

and woos her, she becomes his wife.

Mary Penberthy's beauty, dignity, and gracious womanhood, supplemented by the charm of a fresh innocent nature, wholly unspotted from the world, captivated the heart and mind of the masterful soldier-political. His effulgence vivified the pure retiring maiden of Rose Cottage as a burst of sunlight does the modest woodland violet after weeks of rain and cloud. He put forth his compelling hand and plucked the violet, and lo! the delicate-scented flower lost part of its subtle fragrance for him.

In truth, when Mary Penberthy married George Fitzhugh she was better fitted for the cloister than the hearth. Her tranquil, contemplative life, the monotony of her environment, her circumscribed horizon, the very sameness of the one constant

landscape, and the even progression of the seasons year after year, had all combined to narrow her sympathies and cramp her mind. From these causes and the absence of eligible men in her neighbourhood—for the athletic curate with only £80 a year hardly counted—she was, at twenty-five years of age, an unawakened and wholly simple woman. Living in seclusion, with no companion but her mother, and no joys but that mother's love, her views were bounded on one side by a piano, and on the other by the knowledge derived from selected literature.

George Fitzhugh wooed her as a conqueror who would not be denied : he glamourised her, hypnotized her, so to speak, and when he asked her to marry him at once, as he had soon to return to duty, her mother smiled a sad approval, and her lover's uncle declared he would die happy if she accepted his boy, and so she consented. But, alas ! George's proprietary kiss awoke in her no gentle delight, and possession no response.

She seemed, in truth, a born celibate. The realities of marriage came to her as a rough surprise, a bitter disillusion. Fragile in health, coldly chaste in sentiment, the most delicate art was needed to bridge for the pure young girl the gulf that lies between the poetic imaginings of maiden tenderness and the dawn of passionate love.

No faint comprehension of this truth stirred in George's breast. His clumsy ardour bruised the heart he sought to cherish, and estranged the ethereal nature he sought to unite with his own.

Thus, day by day, they strayed further into a maze of withered hopes, the clue to escape from which George could not discover. Before the honeymoon was over, it seemed that this was the atmosphere in which they were doomed to live, far away, yet sometimes strangely near the paradise-garden of lovers' dreams.

The months passed, yet no welcome sunlight illuminated their dark horizon. Must it, he asked himself, always be thus? Would his fervour never meet anything but this pale response, this chastely cold affection? Would Mary's lithe figure never spring to his embrace, her white arms be never pressed round him in deepest tenderness, her sweet eyes never glow on him with the exquisite look of surrendering love?

A day came when he saw her pass through the mysteries of motherhood, and hold in her arms the little life born of her own. Alas! the child seemed to put them still further apart. The young wife found in maternal affection all that her soul craved for. Every thought was centred in her boy. His advent had strengthened the barrier between her and her husband. He loved her still? Yes, but like the Snow-Queen in Andersen's fairy-tale, she now froze him when he touched her. As her disappointed yearning lover he could not choose but long for her, could not choose but suffer to find her ever a figure of chill marble, into which he had none of Pygmalion's power to impart life and warmth.

To their friends, the Fitzhughs were an ideally

happy couple, for saint-wife though she was, Colonel Fitzhugh still both loved and reverenced her. Hope was not yet dead in him—it never is in husbands—that some day her coldness would change to warmth, and repay his now patient devotion. On the whole the world considered "Fitz the Fortunate" improved by his marriage, for his wife was a charming hostess to those who did not bore her, and "Fitz" was a good fellow, always hospitably bent, and a thorough sportsman as well. At Mankiala he kept open house, and some of the horses in his large stable were always at the disposal of friends. He lived too magnificently for a second-class Resident, stationed in a wild frontier cantonment, garrisoned by a brigade of Indian troops, and ninety miles from the nearest railway station.

On rumours of his son's extravagance reaching his father—General Sir Alfred Fitzhugh, K.C.B. (retired list)—the old gentleman bluntly wrote to his "boy" he was a fool; he should keep his money for a splash at home, and not waste it amongst trans-frontier savages.

The son thought differently. He replied that he had only one life to live, was spending his best years where he now was, might get knocked over any day, so he meant to get the utmost he could out of life whilst he could enjoy it. He had no vices, only tastes, amongst them a love of horses and doing himself well. Further, his habit of display impressed frontier natives, and half his success in dealing with the border tribes was due to their

admiration for his munificence. They called him the "Ameer *Sahib*," and an Ameer, to be obeyed readily, must spend handsomely. As for a splash at home, no Anglo-Indian, even were he as mean as Sir Thomas Savory, and served for forty years, could lay by money if he had a family. If he—George—had the luck to live until he retired, he would at fifty-five or sixty be almost as comfortable on £1,500 as on £2,500 a year; besides, did he survive his father, he would succeed to the family estate, at the time held by his uncle David. Though that old gentleman was seventy-seven now, there was reason to hope he would see ninety, being a bachelor with a good constitution, who knew how to take care of himself. So on the whole George Fitzhugh was convinced that Omar Khayyām's philosophy of *carpe diem* was the wisest:—

“Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend ;”

* * * * *

“Ah, take the cash, and let the credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum.”

Thus the soldier-political neither heeded the “distant drum” nor his father, but kept a dozen good horses and open house, and was popular and respected both in the Cantonment and throughout the wild border-land in his charge.

* * * * *

On this particular morning we have seen how two small matters had disturbed Colonel Fitzhugh's

equanimity—a wigging from Government, which he thoroughly deserved, and the boredom of having to look into his private accounts. He had faced the latter annoyance by sending for Fazl Ali, and *had childishly tried to forget the former by hiding the Government despatch under his blotting-pad.*

However, in this case, out of sight was not out of mind. His mental vision, like the Rontgen rays, pierced that twenty-sheeted pad, and imprinted on the sensitive brain every word of the offending letter.

Its sting lay, perhaps, in the sarcasm of the concluding paragraph, in which he was called upon for an explanation, as “the Governor-General in Council was at a loss to understand how all the adult male population of a hill tribe, numbering, according to the latest accepted estimates, not more than 5,000 souls, could be described as ‘chiefs.’ Further, His Excellency questioned the capacity of any man, whether head of a clan or simple hill-side gilly, to eat half a sheep daily.”

“They insinuate I am cheating—fudging my political bills — that is what it amounts to,” muttered the Resident to himself.

He fidgeted in his chair, and finally rose and paced the room with knit brows, a fine contemptuous smile playing over his handsome features. Presently the victim of viceregal displeasure stopped abruptly, re-read the message of evil tidings for perhaps the twentieth time, and then, with a sarcastic laugh, tore it into minute fragments. Holding his hand high, as the grain-winnower

does a sieve, he let its contents fall in a broad shower on the floor, regardless of the waste-paper basket gaping wide-mouthed to catch rubbish.

Having begun the business of the morning in *this destructive style*, he determined to work through his other papers with due deliberation. He sat down at his desk and felt satisfaction that his feet were trampling on some of the scattered fragments of the letter which had roused his sleeping devil. He rapidly disposed of his meagre *dâk*—political officers in India have only one master to serve, the Viceroy, and he is a better master than any local Government or head of a department, because he is above red tape, is always a gentleman, and rewards good service at once and generously.

The morning basket of papers worked through, Colonel Fitzhugh's mind reverted to his trouble. Having, like a vengeful Afghan, so to speak, killed and mutilated his enemy, like a matter-of-fact Briton he began to doubt the wisdom of his pulverizing precipitancy. The Government letter required an answer of some sort, that was certain—an explanation as to why Pechistani chiefs had such large appetites, and how it was that in some of the small democracies, in that network of mountains, all men being equal and every boy a man, as soon as he had taken a life, every male tribesman was technically a chieftain, lord of himself at least, and as good as his neighbour. The Resident felt he had been hasty in destroying the Government letter, for though he could repeat it

by heart, he knew neither its date nor number. Stooping down, he collected some of the pieces, and was fortunate enough to find the one containing the information which he required. As he began to write, his face grew sinister again. His familiar was evidently about to have a second innings.

The pen moved rapidly for some minutes, then paused, then dashed out a word and substituted another. "Not sure about the double 'l,'" he said to himself, looking at "fulfil" with an extra "l" at the end, "how superior little Fazl Ali is whenever he detects a misspelling."

Then he felt in the left-hand drawer of his desk for the always-handy dictionary, and as he did so his eyes rested on a framed photograph, the sole non-official intruder on his table. Instantly the look of hard defiance on his features gave way to one of tender deprecation. He was transfigured, illuminated; his brown eyes glistened liquidly, exchanging as it seemed loving thoughts with the enframed faces in that picture.

Chapter II

EDEN BEFORE THE FALL

THE faces in the photograph were those of a gentle mother and a curl-crowned child adoring each other. But the tranquil eyes of the mother did not rest on her boy, but on George Fitzhugh himself, and were now softening the tempestuous indiscipline of mind, which was a characteristic of that masterful soldier-political.

He never let his gaze dwell on the saint-like image of his wife, imprinted on that paper, without recognising his own unworthiness and her nobility, and vowing to try to diminish the gulf between them. Curiously in her presence, the feeling was sometimes less potent than in her absence. The steadfast truth, trust, and affection, radiating from his wife's face in the photograph, quickened his higher nature, whereas her actual touch, the melodious cadence of her passionless voice sometimes, during a passing minute or two, when an impatient mood was on him, was more irritating than soothing.

As he exchanged pure thoughts with that pic-

tured angel his mind roamed back over the incidents of their three years of married life, his depression at their first parting a year previously, the weekly anxiety preceding the weekly pleasure derived from her letters from home, the joy of receiving her back again—a joy which had occurred a month before this story opens—and the pride and delight he had felt in beholding the puny delicate babe—but fourteen months old when sent to England—return to him a jolly, talking, toddling, laughing boy.

He was roused from retrospection by a low measured voice at the door saying, "George, may I come in?"

Colonel Fitzhugh sprang up, strode to the door and opened it, and there stood before him the chief subject of his thoughts, his Mary, his good angel, the one person—until the child returned to him—in all the world whom he knew could do no wrong, no, nor think it.

She was a tall, fair, gracious woman twelve or fourteen years younger than himself, clear complexioned, healthy perhaps, but deficient in colour, and evidently far from robust, her face being stamped with that pathetically appealing look so often seen amongst delicately nurtured English ladies, whom fate dooms to residence in India, whilst nature intended them never to venture East of Suez. The marking "not made for India," is traceable on many an English child's face, but when seen on a young mother's it is pitifully conspicuous and draws out, or ought to, all that is

good and chivalrous in man to lighten the physical purgatory of her exile.

Just at present Mary, recently from home, fresh from draughts of love and worship beside her boy's crib, and dressed, as she always was, with the taste of an artistic nature, had more colour and animation than usually characterized her.

"How happy you are looking, George!" she said, as all smiles and geniality he welcomed her to his official den.

"Yes, dear, for I have you and Alan with me again. I had an awfully lonely time without you."

"Naturally, but you had your work, and it is occupation which contents a man."

He shook his head deprecatingly, but she continued heedless of the protest.

"Have you had good news—official news, I mean? You must have to be so pleased. Am I not right?"

"N—o," he replied slowly.

Then taking her hand in his and facing her he proceeded, "I was communing with my guardian angel when you came to the door. She is always there, you know," pointing to the photograph. "It was she who kept me straight when you were away, Mary."

"Kept you straight!" she repeated in surprise. "No—no, you require the presence of no wife to do that. You are a good man and I can always trust you."

"But I distrust myself, Mary. I want many things I have not got."

He spoke deliberately, wistful dissatisfaction apparent in his voice. She looked up at him, and the loving reproof in her eyes dispelled the lurking vexation from his. Placing her other hand on his, she stroked it, and sighing, said reflectively, "How different strong men are to us weak women. Here am I contented, almost happy. I have baby, I have you, I have many friends here, and a few at home kept near and dear through correspondence; then I have my books and music, and the only thing more I want is health. But you, you have all these things, and your work, and a great reputation besides; why, George, what more can you desire?"

"You, dear!"

"But you have me?"

"Yes, as a saint-wife,—would any man be quite content with that?"

"Poor George," she exclaimed wearily, still holding and stroking his hand, "I had hoped you had risen above your old self; we discussed the whole subject soon after baby was born, and you agreed with me then, and I thought it had gone out of your mind. Besides, you are older and wiser now."

"Doubtless, but not too old to love you, Mary."

"To love me! oh my poor, poor George, how you have fallen in my esteem, and you said you were done with all—what shall I call it? well, materialism."

"Yes, but at that time there were reasons. Can you not be saint and woman both?"

The plea was spoken softly, tenderly—the question asked eagerly, warmly, an undertone of bitterness anticipating the answer.

Mary flung away his hand with a gesture of disdain, rose slowly to her feet, and facing him moaned, "George, George, how can you have the heart to hurt me with such talk! You are unworthy of—" and then words failed her. All colour had fled from her face, and the pain she was suffering was visible about her eyes.

The appeal aroused his better nature at once; his evil familiar retreated discomfited.

He impulsively put his arm round his wife's swaying figure, which seemed to him to shrink from the contact, and whispered in deep contrition, "Forgive me—I was wrong—I am little better than a brute with you sometimes, poor suffering Mary."

She let her whole weight rest on his arms and answered softly, "I too was wrong; I do love you, but not that way; I am not strong like you. I have read and thought a great deal since baby came, and I see things differently."

"Of course, dear, of course, you are always right," he interjected, anxious to make his peace.

"We are the best of friends, George, are we not?"

"Yes, dear."

"And you love me—my way, don't you?"

"Y—es," a little doubtfully.

"Then kiss me, George."

He pressed his lips in fraternal fashion on her

forehead, a little perhaps to his wife's disappointment, and said earnestly, " You are my saint, my guardian angel."

The words were worshipful, tender, and pleasing, but not wholly satisfying even to a saint-wife. Was she only that and nothing more to him? They were not yet spirits, but man and wife, and the man's desire was for a love not altogether spiritual. Were all women like her the world would become depopulated, and no woman would know the joy of being a mother. After all, was she doing her duty to her husband? Why, his kiss on her forehead was more perfunctory and colder even than her brother's used to be.

In doubt and perplexity, her whole being in a tremor for sympathy, she put her arms round his neck, kissed his lips and said, " George, George, how I wish I could love you more; but I do love you."

" Yes," he replied, a little grimly; " the quality of your love is affection, and the quantity is a small fraction of what you feel for baby."

" There you begin again, sir," she said, recoiling. But the thought of her darling was filling her mind, and the bitterness underlying his words passed hardly realized.

Thinking aloud, she proceeded: " Baby, my little baby; he is asleep now dreaming of his mother; he insisted on saying his bed-time prayer after breakfast, so Margaret tells me, because he said he wanted to have more time at night to love his mother."

Next minute she was in the nursery waiting for her idol to wake from his midday rest.

When she had gone Colonel Fitzhugh tore up the official reply he had been writing, with reference to his wigging, and drafted a careful conciliatory explanation, the tone and substance of which were such that His Excellency the Viceroy, some time after at a great Calcutta dinner, publicly announced, when referring to frontier politics, that Colonel Fitzhugh "possessed the entire confidence of the Government of India," and humorously acknowledged that Pechistan hill-men were a peculiar people, extraordinary in their appetites and institutions, the former evidenced by the Resident's butcher's bills, the latter by the fact that every male amongst them over twelve years of age was a "chief," with as good a title to a voice in the affairs of his clan as any M.P. in those of Great Britain.

* * * * *

Having finished his work, Colonel Fitzhugh was about to leave office when, punctual to the stroke of two, Fazl Ali's yellow face peered in at the door. Seeing, as he thought, that his master had not forgotten the appointment, the Munshi entered, introducing with himself the melody of the musical chime of gongs which proclaimed that lunch was on the table.

Colonel Fitzhugh, hungry, forgetful, and impatient, asked his factotum why he had come.

"With your accounts, sir, by order," was the precise reply.

•

"Ah, yes, let me see—when did I see them last?"

"Just before Mrs. Fitzhugh *Sahib* went home, sir."

"A year ago! Well, how do I stand both with you and the Calcutta Bank?"

"The bank, sir, has a credit balance in your favour of Rs155. Your account with me is a little complicated, and——"

"Oh, never mind, just arrange to remit Rs2,000, or better make it Rs2,500 at once to the bank for me, and I will go through the accounts another day. I have no time just now."

"Very good, sir, I will do it at once; but I require a written order."

"What an exacting accountant you are, Fazl Ali! Sit down and write the order yourself."

He did so. His master having dashed off his signature glanced at the wording.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "it begins 'advance me,' why surely I have a credit balance with you?"

"It is a mere protective formula, sir. This is the 25th of November, and pay-day is the 1st," was Fazl Ali's adroitly evasive explanation.

Colonel Fitzhugh nodded assent.

"May I go, sir, now?" asked the munshi in his set mechanical way.

"Yes; there is nothing else. Stay, here is an official letter to be copied, you had better do it yourself as it is confidential," and the Resident handed to his Munshi the revise of the letter

which he had written so carefully just before the man came in.

Fazl Ali took it, backed to the door and went off. As he left the room the usually enamel-like skin of his smooth face puckered into expression, relief competing for place with satisfied cunning.

The little man gone, the big master leisurely followed. He, too, was pleased with his morning's work ; he had given the Foreign Secretary the soft answer which turneth away wrath, had made love, or rather advances, to his wife, and her constitutional, or at least habitual coldness had been roused into a show of feeling, and then he had arranged for a present for her forthcoming birthday.

He had each year given her some present, always diamonds of considerable value, but this year he meant to surprise her with something really handsome. Saint though she was, Mary was still woman enough to love diamonds, and no woman he had ever seen set them off better than she did.

He was thus in excellent humour when he went to lunch. To reach his own chair he had to pass behind hers. As he did so he could not resist the temptation of pausing to enjoy the pose of her graceful head and to touch her beautiful hair. She felt the caress, and, smiling said, "I know you admire it. Baby has the same. Are you not glad ?"

" Yes ; but he is a boy, and it does not matter in a boy ; besides, it won't last in his case ; it will

become dark as mine. Just now he is all delight, all love for his Madonna mother, an image of unfallen nature, but it won't last—nothing lasts."

"What a pessimist you are!" she protested. "Don't spoil my enjoyment by croaking, but listen. I have a surprise for you. Baby is an agnostic."

"Already? What infantile depravity!"

"Not exactly—at least it was excusable. You know his 'God-bless-eberybody' prayer. Well, when he had finished last night he asked, 'Who is God?' I said, 'God is He who takes care of Baba.' At that he frowned, and asked, 'Where is God?' I answered, 'Everywhere.' He looked round the room in bewilderment, searching for God, evidently, and then shaking his head objected, 'Baby not see God.' After a little reflection he added with determination, 'Baby not want God. Baby have muddy.' Oh, George! he is my idol. I am sometimes fearful, I love him so"

"I wonder if he will transfer some of his love to your cousin Dolly, when she comes to-morrow?" questioned George, irrelevantly if not irreverently.

"I hope not," said his wife hastily, and then correcting the thought, "at least, I mean I want all of him for myself. I could not bear sharing him with—with—a stranger."

"Jealous by anticipation, Mary!" he remarked. "I never was, and yet that is just what this little divinity might have made me. He has absorbed you, deprived me even of the minute fraction of your affections which I once had, and

left me nothing. I hunger for what you possess in full measure, but am sent empty away."

"George, don't begin again, please. We see things differently—you mean woman's love, I maternal love and its requital. You will have Dolly to-morrow. I give you leave to make love to her as much as you like."

"Thanks, Mary, for nothing. She's had a disappointment I think you said, and is coming out till she gets over it."

"Perhaps it is so, dear, I did not put her case so bluntly as that. I believe Mr Hargraves, the man she was engaged to, behaved badly. You must do your best to cheer her up whilst she is with us, but I won't have her stealing my baby's affections."

"She was a bridesmaid, was she not, at our wedding?" continued George, "but I was too pre-occupied to notice her, I suppose. I can't recall her. What sort of a girl was she?"

"Of course you cannot remember her," agreed his wife with conviction. "She was an insignificant ordinary sort of girl, a bit of a vixen, and rather fond of practical jokes."

"Ha—ha—ha!" he laughed. "Now you mention that trait, I do recollect her, a pretty, dark, mischievous little thing. Why, don't you remember, we were stared at all the way to Charing Cross station, and there we found a white slipper stuck upright on to the top of our brougham, and she afterwards wrote and told you she had put it there to help our send-off."

"Yes, that was Dolly," Mary admitted, "but now she's a changed woman, she says, and only wants to hide herself with us and learn to forget."

"I expect the truth is, she has got into real mischief this time and wishes to escape the scandal of it," was George's uncharitable conclusion.

"I don't know the facts, dear, but you will be good to her, won't you? She is fond of horses, hunts a little, and will be a companion to you in your rides."

"All right. I'll take her in hand," he promised, with lordly condescension, but immediately afterwards qualified his magnanimity by adding, "If she proves a wet blanket, you will send her away, won't you?"

"Of course, dear," his wife consented; "but I don't think she will bore you, she has plenty of pluck and fun in her."

"Then it's a bargain. I'll ride out two stages and bring her in myself." But instantly repenting such a rash offer, he asked Mary if she could not manage to come too.

"I could not leave baby so long," she replied; but to soften his evident disappointment, supplemented her refusal by adding, "You are always considerate where women are concerned, I thank you beforehand on poor Dolly's account."

"Well, I only hope she won't get me into trouble; she succeeded with herself, you know," laughed George. "I am always weak about a woman in distress, and a pretty girl with a broken heart may prove the very devil."

"Don't be nervous, George," said Mary to encourage him. "Were she Vivien herself, I should trust you. Besides, you have me, so there cannot be any danger for you."

Chapter III

DOLLY ENTERS EDEN

DOLLY—or for once to give that distressful young person her full name, Miss Dorothea Carew—was to arrive at the Residency by special *tonga* about 4 p.m. Colonel Fitzhugh sent his mail-phaeton out twenty miles the evening before to the Nowrang camping ground with two pairs of horses. Next day, after a late breakfast, and half an hour's romp with Alan, he saw his young hopeful put to bed for his mid-day siesta, reminded his wife of her promise to get rid of their coming visitor, should she prove a wet blanket, and then rode out to Nowrang to meet her.

At that desolate changing-station there was a Government rest-house, a mere shell of sun-baked bricks thickly plastered with mud, a useful but hideous structure, more suggestive of a grave than an inn. As he rode up, a little after two o'clock, Colonel Fitzhugh saw a luggage-laden *tonga* standing in front of one of the rooms. Securely roped on the side nearer him was a lady's portmanteau marked D. Carew. There were no servants to be seen, though voices wrangling in the detached

kitchen were audible. Upon dismounting the Colonel left his horse with his escort—a couple of troopers of the 1st Punjab Cavalry—and entered the bungalow.

At the large central table sat a young woman in an attitude of *abandon*. Her face was hidden between her arms, and they were thrown forward on a coarse dust-covered table-cloth, which had once been white and clean. She was sobbing hysterically.

"Miss Carew," said the intruder, advancing, "I am so grieved to be late."

She stopped crying, and as she raised her head a blush spread over the tired, dejected face.

"I am George Fitzhugh, your cousin Mary's husband," he announced simply.

She tried to produce a conventional smile, but failed, and without a word shook hands with him; and he noticed how small, well-shapen, and muscular they were.

To relieve her evident embarrassment he rattled away pleasantly on topics which might interest her—how well he remembered her at his wedding; what a send-off she had helped to give them; how Cousin Mary would have come herself, but was not strong enough for the forty mile drive there and back, besides she had an exacting baby who claimed much of her attention.

When Miss Carew had found her voice she excused herself for having broken down; the journey had been long and fatiguing, and travelling was so different on the frontier to what it was in

civilized places. After nine hours of bumping and jolting in that rough machine, outside, she had been suddenly deposited in this huge mud-pie of a building, had seen her luncheon, a fowl, chased and caught by a nearly naked native with a knife in his hand, and had since been sitting alone inside, whilst, as she supposed, the bird was being killed, plucked, and cooked, and not a soul within sight or hearing. Oh, it was all too horrible !

"I ought to have been here sooner, I know," he apologized, "but Alan, that's my boy, was so beguiling, he insisted on my playing bears with him, and then mounted and rode me about the garden, and somehow I did not notice how time went. You will forgive me, won't you ? and please don't tell Mary I was late."

"Do you stand in such awe of my cousin ?" the girl asked, the suspicion of an amused smile playing about her flexible mouth.

"Not exactly ; but I like her to think well—the best of me, in fact," he answered, with sincere simplicity.

By this time the fowl-cutlets were ready, and supplemented by a hamper of good things produced from the phaeton.

The traveller drank a glass of champagne to please her new cousin, though she would probably have preferred tea. The champagne did its duty, made surroundings almost cheerful, and helped to dry Miss Dolly's eyes and send a glow of warmth into her cheeks. Colonel Fitzhugh took note of these changes and now began to think

that the girl would be positively pretty, were she differently dressed and in good spirits

Luncheon over, he withdrew to smoke outside and superintend preparations, leaving his charge to get ready. He mooned over to the stables, and after a time ordered the horses to be put in, then he went to the police station and inquired about the most recent murder, and finally he returned to the bungalow. He hated waiting for any one, and particularly on the present occasion, as, were his charge not quick, they would be benighted on the road. He was about to call to her to hurry herself, when she appeared in the verandah, no longer the despondent young person of an hour before, but a smart little lady, whose only traces of fatigue were tell-tale circles about the eyes.

Colonel Fitzhugh, who, by now, was half through his third cheroot, and very much bored, forgot his impatience on seeing what a charming girl stood before him. She was *mignonne*, but her figure was perfect, her eyes were brown and sympathetic, her teeth small, regular, and strong, her upper lip short, the lower full, the face was oval, and the general expression, just now pathetic in its sadness, was suggestive of a bright, merry disposition.

As he realized what a *piquante* piece of young womanhood Miss Dolly was, he wondered how his wife could have described her as "an insignificant, ordinary-looking girl," and charitably put the misdescription down to the improvement in appearance made by a love affair, as Mary had not seen her

cousin for more than a year, and her engagement to Mr. Jack Hargraves had only been given out six months before.

"Glad you are ready, at last, Miss Dolly," the Colonel said, deferentially doffing his hat, and regarding her with unmistakable admiration.

"I have not been very long, have I?" she inquired, letting her soft eyes dwell on his with frank challenge.

"No, not very, considering your metamorphosis; but we have no time to lose. Even I do not care to drive far from the station after dark in these uncanny regions."

"Please don't be cross, coachman," she said, with an attempt at gaiety—and giving him her hand she mounted lightly into her place.

Next minute they were off homewards, bowling along the military road to Mankiala at steady mail-coach speed. Miss Dolly was inquisitive, and poured forth questions about all she saw or missed: why so few trees showed autumn tints yet? why small birds were not to be seen or heard—were none of them songsters? why every mounted native they met or passed hurriedly scrambled down from his horse? why some stared at them rudely, whilst others made a sort of curtsy? She jumped from subject to subject in a most inconsequent fashion, hardly giving Colonel Fitzhugh time to answer a question.

All of a sudden her voice faltered: she put a hand to her hat, feeling for her veil, but no veil was there; she turned her face to the fields on

her own side—fields rich in close patches of sugar-cane and turmeric—as if to observe their strange crops better; she stealthily put her hand to her eyes, for tears stood in them; she felt in her pockets, but to no purpose; what she sought was in her bag, no doubt.

Colonel Fitzhugh, whilst pretending to be entirely occupied with his horses, watched the whole performance, and found an opportunity for slyly laying his own folded handkerchief in her lap. When she noticed the intruding cambric she pushed it away petulantly, tried to smile, but instead burst into tears, crying, "It is all so hard, but I cannot help being a baby."

"Of course not, little Dolly," he responded encouragingly, with sympathetic gravity; "just let it come: that was my way when I wanted to cry, but no one minds me now, so I have given it up."

The absurdity of a great, big, middle-aged man booing like a naughty child, and nobody minding, arrested further painful retrospection, and Miss Dolly asked with whimsical gravity, "Used you really to cry sometimes as girls do?"

Having told her some fibs, and caused her to laugh, he put his big weathered hand, like a brown wrapper, over her small white one, and said coaxingly, "Now tell me the whole story. It's better out than in."

"It was the phaeton," she explained; "the last time I drove like this was when Jack, Mr. Hargraves, I mean, and I had our final quarrel. We were engaged, you know. He rode over me

out hunting one morning, and then he called next day, and—and then every day, and by degrees we got fond of each other, and decided to marry, but he was very exacting. He said that I was always talking to a curate, whom every one spoilt; he was so handsome, and preached such picturesque sermons. I replied that he was always with a pretty cousin of his. Then Jack came over one Sunday on his mail-phæton, like yours, and after church we drove out together. He was very serious and lectured me, so I laughed at his long face, and lectured him, and it ended in ‘don’ts’ from him and ‘sha’n’ts’ from me. Next morning he went off to Africa, I was told. And people said he had thrown me over as I was a flirt, and—and—there—that’s all. So now I’ve come out to Cousin Mary.”

“And Cousin George, too, Miss Dolly, I hope”

“Yes, to Cousin—George, too,” she repeated a little shyly.

“Well, I think you were both a couple of babies, and not fit for the holy estate of matrimony.”

“Why? I am grown up. I am twenty,” protested Miss Dolly, objecting to be looked down upon as a baby.

“And he?”

“He said he was thirty; but he looks a boy.”

“Take my advice, little girl, and dry your pretty eyes, and enjoy your springtime, and then when Mr. Jack comes here in search of you, he will find you more fascinating than before, and cry *peccavi.*”

"But he won't come; he does not know where I am," asserted Miss Dolly, inclined to give way to tears again.

"Nonsense; you are not a needle in a haystack. He can find you if he likes, and if he does not come here soon he won't be worth a tear."

"I'll try to follow your advice—cousin," Miss Dolly promised with a sigh and a troubled smile.

So the ice was broken between the new cousins, and a confidence and bond of sympathy started as well. After that conversation was easy, and Miss Dolly began to think that existence for a time without Jack would be tolerable, as "Cousin George" seemed to like her, and was very kind and amusing, though he called himself forty—a great age in her eyes.

At the last change, seven miles from Mankiala, as the cantonment meant to dominate the valley and overawe Pechistan was called, Miss Dolly proposed to take the reins herself.

"They'll pull your arms off; they are keen to get home," protested the colonel.

"Don't be afraid, cousin," was her confident rejoinder. "These beauties won't pull an ounce after the first half-mile. Besides, there is a long ascent in front of us."

He surrendered at discretion, and Miss Dolly soon showed she had not over-estimated her powers. The pair responded to her light firm control of their mouths, and to her soothing friendly voice, in a way which drew honest compliments from her cousin. They arched their

necks, played with their bits, cocked their ears, occasionally turning one or both back as if to catch the word of command or approval from a mistress whom they already loved to obey.

"It's wonderful ; even the beasts of the field are your subjects already. What is your secret?" murmured Colonel Fitzhugh in admiration.

"I love animals, horses in particular, and they know it, that is all," was her simple answer.

They were now driving nearly due west, and nearing the top of the long ascent, whence Miss Dolly would see the famous vale of Mankiala, which was to be her home for some months to come. Her cousin's praises had pleased her ; she felt they were genuine, and knew they were well-deserved. She was as good a whip as horse-woman. Her spirits were rising ; and as they rose she talked merrily as if she had not a care in the world. In the midst of her chatter, lo ! the crest of the pass was reached, and with an exclamation of, "Oh ! how beautiful," Dolly pulled up.

She gazed in silent wonder on a scene which extorts admiration even from natives, and will a few years hence find a place in tourists' guide-books as one of the loveliest views in India.

There, in front of her, lay a rich, fully cultivated valley, with a silvery streak of glistening river meandering through it. At intervals were walled villages, each a miniature fort, the dull sameness of their colouring relieved by the white domes and minarets of mosques. Amongst the fields, still patchily green with turmeric, or yellow-tinted with

close-packed cane, stood out in lofty nakedness, picturesque watchtowers, and everywhere were groves of walnut trees and clumps of straw-coloured bamboos. Here and there were cemeteries, their limits clearly defined by avenues and borderings of tall funeral cypresses, whose outlines streaked their lighter surroundings with dark olive-green.

Beyond, on the farther side of the valley, close under a low range of mountains, the cantonment itself was visible, and immediately above it, on the skyline of the main ridge, stood out in bold defiance of the peaceful scene beneath, the stupendous walls and bastions of a great grim fortress, its lower parts black in sombre shadow, its higher walls and towers red and gorgeous under the slanting rays of the setting sun. There it lay before the girl's wondering eyes, like some vast old-world monster brooding evil for all that was fair and good. Its clear-cut massiveness, its apparent nearness, seemed to dominate and threaten the whole of that idyllic valley. It simply fascinated Dolly. She sat gazing in awestruck silence, and then in a subdued tone asked, "What is it? Who lives there? Who built it?"

"What? that 'rose-red fortress, half as old as time,'" misquoted Fitzhugh, as he wondered over the girl's impressionism. "The natives call it 'Kâfir-Kot,' which means 'infidel's fort.' I believe God, not man, made it; but I have never been up to it."

After more questions and answers, just as creep-

ing night had enveloped the last pinnacles of Kâfir-Kot in deepened gloom, Dolly, remembering where they were, said, "Shall we go on now?"

"Yes; Mary will be getting anxious," was her companion's answer.

They drew up in front of the Residency as the short Indian twilight was darkening into night. Mary heard them, and flew to the door, her face and voice blending welcome with relieved apprehension, for, after sundown, fevers, bandits, and assassins might be lying in ambush for the unwary. The two women kissed each other effusively, after which Dolly was taken to her room. When Mary returned, she said to her husband, "Dolly tells me you have been very kind to her. When you know her good qualities, you two will be great allies. I am sure, George, you have already discovered that she is anything but the wet blanket you expected."

"She is showers or sunshine as the mood is," he remarked, with purposeful indifference, as though cold speech could subdue warm feeling.

"You don't like her?" interrogated Mary, disappointed.

"Well, she's a good whip, and says she can ride. By the way, does she say she likes me?"

"Oh, yes, she's fond of you already."

"I should be ungrateful not to respond. Yes, I do like her," he admitted magnanimously.

As Dolly was really tired out, "all the spring out of her," as she described it, Mary insisted on her going to bed after a hot bath, and husband and wife had the evening to themselves. It was a

happy few hours for them both : they saw Alan have his tub, and heard him say his prayer, ending, "God bless eberybody," but were rather startled with the impromptu rider, "And God come to tea to-morrow ; baby's habing party, and you shall have some cake."

Whatever their divergence in religious views and mental environment generally, they were absolutely at one about Alan ; he was the most adorable child in the universe, in looks innocent perfection, in intelligence almost uncanny, in theology certainly unique.

After dinner Mary sat at the piano and played some of George's favourite songs and pieces from operas. For some reason he was less volubly appreciative than usual, so she changed to sacred music, which she loved, and sang as she played like a choiring angel before the Throne. George smoked and listened in dreamy silent satisfaction, and was annoyed to find his thoughts less concentrated on the music or Mary's perfections than they ought to have been.

An appealing, inviting little face, now doubtless sunk in deep innocent slumber on its pillow, would obtrude, and the thought flitted through his mind that if Dolly was to be the serpent in his partially realized Eden, she was a most delectable serpent indeed.

Chapter IV

A MORNING WITH THE HOUNDS

THE reaction after her long trying journey up-country—eighty-two hours by rail and nine by special *tonga* without rest,—the consciousness that every mile from Bombay severed her more cruelly than before from her lover, who might be repentant as she was, the despair of that solitary half-hour in that dreary rest-house, followed by the unexpected stimulant of that pleasant afternoon with her new cousin and her welcome from Mary, conduced to make Dolly subdued and thoughtful for a few days. During that quiet time she varied fitfully between grave and gay, now romping and laughing with Alan as if she were his sister in the schoolroom, now chaffing Cousin George on what she called his “political manner,” now shutting herself in her room and crying over her bundle of love-letters.

She attached herself to Mary, and gained that young mother's whole heart by the discretion of

her devotion to baby, and her sweet unselfishness of disposition. She was not musical, but contributed to make leisure hours pass pleasantly by playing cards or billiards with George, when friends were not dining, or Mary was feeling tired.

About a week after her arrival her boxes came, and what with the joy of having her "things" again, the kindness shown by every one in the station to her, and the satisfaction that her cousins were as fond of her as she was of them, she put away sad memories altogether—at least in public—and began to throw her whole bright self into the occupation of the hour.

One morning a new friend of hers, young Lorimer, or to introduce him properly, Mr. Spenser Lorimer, C.S., Assistant to the Resident, called rather early, and asked to see her. He told her that the first meet of the station hounds was to take place next morning; he did not like putting the question direct to Mrs. Fitzhugh, but he hoped, the whole hunt hoped, that that lady would grace the occasion by her presence. "And as for you, Miss Carew," he added, "I am sure you will come. We all want to see you lead the field, and jump the big brook. The fox is sure to head for the hills; they always do so at the beginning of the season."

"You assume a great deal, Mr. Lorimer, but I'll do my best," promised Dolly, to whom the idea of a gallop across country was delightful.

Mr. Lorimer withdrew, pleased with the success of his diplomatic mission.

He anticipated if Miss Carew came to the meet, his chief would come too, and that if she tried she would succeed in inducing Mrs. Fitzhugh to join also. Their expected presence would cause the whole station to turn out, and if so, the season would be started with fitting *éclat*. He was one of the whips, and notwithstanding his studious habits, professorial spectacles, and self-contained manner, he was a keen sportsman. He had a reverence almost amounting to worship for Mrs. Fitzhugh, and was very fond of her husband. Though disapproving of the Resident's careless ways and impatience of detail, young Lorimer was fully aware of his chief's good qualities, perhaps even exaggerated them —his extraordinary personal influence over the unruly Pechistanis, his indifference to danger, his tenacity of purpose, and his fearlessness of responsibility.

The hunt met at the second milestone on the Nowrang Road, and was attended by the whole Fitzhugh party—Mary on her husband's handsomest and best-trained Arab, Dolly on a wiry, country-bred mare, three-quarters Irish, called Kathleen, and the Resident on a powerful waler. It was a cold morning, the smoke from the dung fires in the villages hung lingeringly in the still air over the closely-packed houses of the peasantry like a blue mist. Indoors people were just waking to life's dull round of routine; out-

of-doors few were yet stirring, and those few were trudging with sluggish steps to work, each man enveloped in blanket or quilt, indifferently his bed-covering by night, and his body-warmer by day, until the sun should pierce the mists, which were still brooding heavily over the damp and often water-logged fields. Now was the time to catch those night-thieves, fox or jackal, before man moved from home, and by his presence abroad, sent them sneaking back to their hiding-places in the broken ground under the hills.

As soon as the ladies from the Residency appeared, Captain Haynes, the M.F.H., trotted off with his hounds, only nine couple in all, and carefully drew several copses and patches of cane. A whimper or two, and then half the pack streamed out from cover, only to be ignominiously whipped back by the ubiquitous Lorimer.

"Ware riot, Bellman ; back again, Jess," he cried, cracking his whip and galloping after disobedient stragglers.

"Why did he not let them go?" asked Mary of her husband.

"It was a wild cat they were after," he answered, standing up in his stirrups on the watch for Bellman, the steadiest hound of the lot.

Presently Captain Haynes trotted over to the ladies, and suggested that they should post themselves at a particular corner of a five-acre field—

partly walled garden and partly cane—to which he was about to lead the pack.

"It is a sure find until Christmas," he explained. "The difficulty is to make Reynard break. We don't want a cowardly Jack to-day, but a plucky little hill-fox."

"What are you going to do with those coolies there?" asked Dolly, pointing to fifteen or twenty blanketed men and boys sitting like black crows just outside the cane.

"Those men? well, you are supposed not to notice them, but they are beaters," he answered, "until the cane is more cut it is impossible with a small pack to get the wily one to break unless we use beaters."

"So you beat him till he does, and we are not to look," commented Dolly, laughing, though she knew what he meant. It was evident that as yet she did not think highly of fox-hunting on the frontier.

The coolies had now formed line, and began their work; then followed a whimper or two as the pack began to open. The ladies had taken up their position, and Mary had just explained to Dolly that what she wanted was a run and no kill, when Colonel Fitzhugh held up a warning hand and said, "Hush"; then touching his wife's arm, he pointed to the spoil-bank of a water-course some sixty yards from their coign of observation.

"I see him," whispered Dolly, eagerly, "there, creeping away and looking round every few yards."

"I see him now; I do hope he will escape," chimed in Mary.

"He's heading beautifully for the open country," Colonel Fitzhugh remarked.

Presently the hounds were on the scent, and, with heads down, led by an ambitious youngster called Hotspur, giving tongue every few yards, dashed out of the cane or over the wall of the garden, and hunted in a long string up the channel. Reynard was now about two hundred yards ahead of his pursuers and running, not for the hills, but straight for the next patch of cane. The field followed in straggling fashion, as the delay and uncertainty had caused individual riders to scatter. The Residency party, Captain Haynes, and a few others, being well placed at the start, led the hunt and had a good view of the tactics of hounds and fox. The latter improved his lead by a clever double, which caused a check, and then being viewed by Jess and Bellman, a race ensued for the next cover. Reynard reached it in safety, and whilst pursuers and pursued repeated the game of hide and seek in the cane, the field gradually came up, their numbers reduced by a casualty or two.

The pace had been fast for half a mile or more, hence all were pleased with themselves; all were warm and animated now, discussing the sharp gallop, and the probability that, coolies being un procurable, the fox would stick to his asylum this time. In that expectation quite half the hunt dismounted to breathe their horses or ponies. The

M.F.H. and a few stanch sportsmen with him, including the Residency party, attended to business.

There is no accounting for the ways of a fox—or a woman—and Reynard on this occasion did not belie the truth of the saying. He tried to double back, but seeing his mounted pursuers between him and his former shelter, stole undiscovered through the dense growth, and was off and away making straight for the hills some three minutes before any one caught sight of him.

"Tally ho! Yoicks away," screamed the master, blowing his horn to collect the out-maneuvred hounds.

"He's making direct for the brook. I told you he would, Miss Carew," shouted Lorimer. "Come on with me, please, and show them how to take it."

Dolly seemed inclined to accept the challenge, but first looked towards her cousins for guidance. Colonel Fitzhugh hesitated, when an imploring "Please come or you will miss it all," from Lorimer roused him to decision.

"Yes, go, Dolly, if you like; give Kathleen her head at the water and she'll get over," he consented grandly, then gnawing discontentedly at his moustache he turned to Mary.

"Come, Mary," he said gently to her; "we can make for a point which the fox must pass, unless he's rolled over sooner."

They cantered off in silence, but both kept

looking round to watch Dolly safe over that dangerous brook.

Presently Mary cried gladly, "She's over; but I was nervous, George."

"There was no occasion," was his calm reply, "Dolly has pluck and Kathleen, if she is trusted, never makes a mistake." Then he added hurriedly, "Now, dear, ride all you know or we'll be late for the fun."

They made for a new-looking shrine and mosque, which stood between hill and vale, like a solitary watcher, on a bare treeless plain. It was sacred ground, that shrine; a holy Sayad had murdered a fat Hindu banker there and been hanged on the spot by the Resident. That was the Sarkar's punishment for his error. He was forthwith canonized as a martyr for his faith by his co-religionists. That was the people's reward for his, in their eyes, judicial murder.

The Sarkar's punishment was certainly excessive, outrageous for such a mistake, considering the relative value of the two lives. Obviously the martyr's memory deserved commemoration, so the pious Pechistanis erected a chapel, piled stones over the grave, and headed it with bamboos stuck into the ground until the cuttings which they had planted should grow into trees—and these bamboos were now gaudy with fluttering flags, contributed by pilgrims and wayfarers, who had prayed there to the buried saint.

He had been hanged only two years before, and already his presence had wrought many miracles,

had made barren wives mothers of sons, the lame, even the dead, literally "to take up their beds and walk." It was a fact that some Mullahs from the hills, accompanied by mourners, carrying a corpse for burial, had rested there and deposited the bier on the grave. After they had prayed and slept they took up the bier, and lo ! it was very light. Removing the coverlet they found under it instead of a man's body the carcase of a high-smelling goat, with its throat cut in orthodox fashion. "A miracle, a miracle," they shouted in delight, and forthwith, accepting the sacrifice, they cooked and ate that tasty flesh.

The story was silent as to who the dead man had been when in life, but that is a mere detail. Any way, the miracle was proclaimed, and all the faithful believed, which is the essential point in matters of faith

As the Fitzhughs and those who had followed their lead approached that holy spot, Reynard, pressed hard by the clamorous hounds, changed his line and ran straight for the mosque. Fox and hounds rushed pell-mell over the saint's grave and into the sanctuary itself, disturbing a group of *tâlib-ul-ilms*, or divinity-students, who were inside, repeating parrot-like chapters of the Koran. The members of the hunt, at least those of them who were up, checked their horses and awaited developments. They all understood the desecration which was being perpetrated, hence no one

attempted to enter the sacred precincts. A babel of sound reached their ears, snarling, barking, baying, and even the shouting of angry men, noises very different to the familiar worry—worry—worry of victory.

Colonel Fitzhugh and Captain Haynes, the master, alone dismounted and approached the small flagged court-yard in front of the mosque, whilst most of the others in pairs or groups, assuming that all was over, walked their animals about at a distance and discussed the events of the morning.

To Dolly such an extraordinary finish to an exciting run was actually interesting, if she were only on writing terms with Jack, what a description she would give of the hunt, her flying jump over the brook, a thing achieved by no lady but herself and only by two men besides Mr. Lorimer, and then the hard-pressed fox taking refuge in a chapel with the hounds almost tumbling over him and the disturbed congregation assaulting fox and hounds indiscriminately—for so she interpreted the confusion of sounds issuing from that narrow doorway.

"Why does not Captain Haynes go inside and separate them," she wondered, "instead of calling to his hounds from outside?"

She pushed her mare a little nearer the building to see and hear better.

Presently some of the hounds came out looking sorry for themselves, and, yes, Bellman was bleeding and Jess limping. Then, following the

hounds, appeared the congregation, twelve or fourteen dirty youths, two with books in their hands, and all in a state of vituperative ebullition. She remembered that the dog is an unclean animal to Muhammadans, so naturally they resented the pollution of their chapel. She saw them stare insolently at the two unarmed Englishmen in front of them, and guessed that their chief spokesman, who was pointing and gesticulating, was abusing the *Sahibs* and their hounds.

Then she saw Cousin George raise an arm to induce silence, and with a good-humoured smile order them to cease shouting. When they had obeyed him, he said some words, which she afterwards learnt were, "The fox, not we, desecrated the mosque, and the hounds wanted to kill him. You are all sportsmen yourselves, and enjoy a good hunt as we do, so cease abusing us and listen. I am the Resident *Sahib*, and, to appease your angry saint, will give you two tins of country oil, enough to keep the lamps on his grave burning every Thursday night for a year."

When he announced who he was, and what he would do, she saw the hostile spokesman salaam respectfully, whilst one of his comrades—a slight-built boy, with a hungry vulpine look on his evil face—edged round behind her cousin. What could the boy want, she wondered. She pushed closer—closer. "—Ah" burst from her, and she spurred her mare on, and with all her force brought

down her hunting crop—a loan from George—on the boy's suddenly up-lifted arm. It fell instantly, and, in falling, dropped an Afghan dagger. Hand or dagger must have struck the intended victim a feeble blow on the back, for he turned instantly.

He saw Dolly pale to the lips, heard her prayer, "Thank God, I was in time," and realized what had happened. Looking up into her eyes, gleaming with many emotions, he said composedly, "You have saved my life—Dolly," and she thought his lips lingered endearingly over her name.

He stooped and picked up the dagger, assured himself with a glance that the baffled assassin was safe in the grasp of Captain Haynes, then said to her in the same quiet way, "Mary and the others have seen nothing. You had better induce them to start homewards, and say I shall catch them up in a few minutes."

"And, Miss Carcw," interposed Captain Haynes, "will you kindly tell Mr. Lorimer to come here with a couple of our fellows. This youth will require attention."

As she turned to do so, she pointed appealingly to the wretched boy lying there half-stunned by the blow with which Captain Haynes had felled him.

Her cousin understood, and laughingly reassured her he would not hang the creature then and there, if it was that she feared, and then catching sight of Reynard disappearing up the hill-side, added, "See, Dolly, the ill-wind blew him good, any way. I'm

glad he got off with nothing worse than a torn coat."

Dolly looked and tried to answer with unconcern, but could not. Her heart was too full.

What had nearly been a tragedy had not moved George. There he stood composed and cheerful, though, but for her, he would have been lying dead or bleeding to death at her feet. She felt that a mysterious fate was uniting their lives, and that now the unspoken bond between them was strong till death should sever it. She had saved George's life she knew, and the fact gave her happiness she tried to analyse her feelings—she loved Mary? Yes, but as woman loves woman. She loved George? Yes, but in a different way, and Jack? she hardly knew how she regarded him now. His image was sometimes vividly present in her dreams, but that presence more often annoyed than pleased her. It was not her fault if she was forgetting him, but his. She ought to have been a well-regulated young wife by now, only fate regulated nothing in an orthodox way for her. It was all a tangle. She would resist no longer, but drift on until some new surprise would change the situation once more.

With her mind full of these thoughts she rejoined Mary and the others, quietly conveyed the message to Mr. Lorimer, and then the whole cavalcade, a few men excepted, started homewards in ignorance how nearly the finish of a jolly run had ended in a tragedy.

When Dolly had gone Colonel Fitzhugh told the

leader of the divinity-students to desist from abusing his misguided clan-fellow for seeking to slay his "father and mother," as he called the Resident *Sahib*, but to come into the station, and get the oil promised to him, and give evidence at the trial.

"Will you hang him, Lord *Sahib*, and burn his body just as you would had he killed you?" asked the leading boy of the mosque-school.

"No, you young fool," answered the Resident, laughing at the Irishism. "I'll only put him to school in jail, and keep him there some years, until I make a good citizen of him."

Just then Lorimer and two officers of the garrison joined them, and the would-be assassin, the infidel-killing inspiration evaporated, limp, dazed, and dejected, was secured, and marched off to the Mankiala jail.

When the Resident caught up his wife, he found her in good spirits, whilst Dolly was riding beside her in pensive silence. The talk was all about the events of the run, and speculation was rife as to whether the fox was killed inside the mosque, or had escaped through a drain or in some other way. Colonel Fitzhugh did not take part in the discussion, but ended doubt by informing the group of riders that he had seen the fox steal out of the mosque and make off to the hills with the loss of half his brush.

Mary thanked her husband for his humanity in staying behind to make sure poor Reynard had escaped—at which charitable assumption Dolly

and he exchanged looks, and then dropping behind the others, rode home together.

At the gate of the Residency the members of the hunt separated, delighted with the success of the opening meet of the season.

Chapter V

LOVE'S EPIPHANY

BY luncheon-time that day Dolly was the station's pride for flying that brook so brilliantly, by dinner-time she was its heroine for having saved the life of the Resident.

The trial of the *ghūsī* took place in the afternoon before Mr. Lorimer, he having been telegraphically empowered for the purpose. Although both Colonel Fitzhugh and Captain Haynes gave evidence, Miss Dolly was the only eye-witness of the attempted assassination. When her statement was translated to the prisoner his humiliation was overwhelming—his God had directed him to kill the infidel Resident ; his Mullah had promised him martyrdom and paradise, yet God and Mullah had both been proved liars, as their design had been frustrated by the hand of a woman, that weak pale girl, who had been speaking so collectedly, and looking at him with such pitying eyes.

He hung his head, he wept bitter tears ; he was disgraced before all men ; but what of God ? what of the priest ? Was not their disgrace greater than his ? Their promises had been false—could it be that the whole fabric of Islām was false too ? Let

him die whilst some shreds of belief remained to him ; after death the riddle, the mystery, if Islām were not a sham, would be revealed. Perhaps—but no, he would be in Hell not Paradise, and Hell was filled with the damned, and their torments, were such that they could not think, could not learn, and if they could learn, who would care to teach the damned ?

His puzzling further over the inscrutable was arrested by the court calling on him in Pashto to make his defence, if he had any.

He shook his head in helpless bewilderment, and stammered forth in low hesitating words, “ I was, an instrument, a blind obedient tool in the hands of my priest, the Mullah Powindah ; but he lied—lied—lied. If you are just, you will hang and burn him, but me—me—let my mother have my body to bury. She reminded me I had the family honour to maintain, then why should I go away from home and leave her and my little brothers unprotected, my father’s death unavenged ? She implored me to at least kill his murderer before taking the life of a *Sahib*. But I went at God’s call as I thought. Mother wept over me when I started. My little brothers and my sister, Aimana, clung to me, as they loved me, and mother told them that they would see Allayar Khan no more.”

The court recorded his statement, and explained to Miss Dolly its purport. In her pity for the boy—who appeared to be not more than seventeen—she almost forgot the nature of his attempted crime.

To Allayar Khan's surprise he was not sentenced to death, but to penal servitude, and told that if he conducted himself well he would see his home again in ten years' time.

That night after dinner Mary heard all particulars. That she had been talking idle words whilst her husband was in supreme danger, that Dolly, not she his wife, had saved his life at the risk of her own, caused the high-souled Mary much heart-searching. She rose from her chair, went to her husband, and kneeling beside him, said, "Dear, dear George, what should I have done had I lost you" ; then turning to Dolly, she threw her arms about the girl, and kissed her, hysterically crying the while, " You watched over him, not I ; you saved him, not I."

"Nonsense, Mary ; I acted on impulse," protested Dolly, seeking to correct her cousin's morbidity. "Any one near would have done the same for a black man even. I did not watch over him at all. It was mere curiosity which made me go so near, wasn't it, George ?"

Being thus appealed to, George wisely agreed, and Mary's emotion gradually subsided, though her swollen eyelids and unusual tenderness towards her husband showed how deeply her feelings had been agitated.

She was sitting on a low chair beside him, her head resting on his knees, when he said to her : "And to think, Mary, that to-day is your birthday,

and that this wretched business made me forget to wish you many happy returns, and give you this little present,"—and he put a small packet into her hands. *Pleased with his thoughtfulness, she thanked him gratefully, and then holding the gift out to Dolly, asked her to open it.* Dolly did so, and presently the large diamond crescent, ordered from Harington and Co., Calcutta, glittered in its lustrous purity before them.

"How good of you, George," said Mary, with tears in her eyes ; "but give it to Dolly, not me ; she deserves it, not I."

"I won't forget her, dear. She shall have one, too," he answered.

"Oh, please not," pleaded Dolly. "Why, this is worth a king's ransom."

"No, no ; only a month's pay," pooh-poohed George ; "it's nothing."

"Then what is left to live on ? Why, you spend here, I am sure, more than your pay, don't you ?" asked the practical girl, still sceptical.

"I don't understand money matters," struck in Mary helplessly ; "but in any case George has expectations."

"Expectations are not assets," objected Dolly.

"Really, Dolly, from your remarks you seem to think my affairs are in a bad way," George protested, his self-satisfaction hurt as she was depriving the gift of half its grace.

"I only want your good," Dolly explained hastily, feeling she had gone too far.

Partially mollified, George deigned to enter into

explanations. "If you must know," he said, "Fazl Ali keeps my accounts, and he is an honest man, and as sharp as they are made."

"*Fazl Ali*," repeated Dolly in astonishment. "Why, Mr. Lorimer told me—" and then she checked her tongue and ended lamely, "told me—I mean that he is your native assistant."

"You forgot it was I who told you," said George stiffly, a little mystified.

Soon afterwards Mary and Dolly retired together to breathe their nightly prayer over Alan asleep, and then seek rest themselves. As George held his cousin's warm firm hand in his, when saying good-night to her, it trembled in his keeping, and she said submissively, "You forgive me, don't you, for interfering just now?"

"Can you doubt it?" he whispered, as his pressure tightened before he released the captive.

Left alone, he subsided into the chair just vacated by Dolly, and began to review the events of the day, as fox-hunters do sometimes after a good run. It was curious, but somehow he could not order his ideas properly—the fox, yes. How pathetically tender she looked as their eyes met after her ejaculation: "Thank God, I was in time." What was he thinking about? Oh, yes, the fox; no, the boy with the dagger thirsting for martyrdom, and some black-eyed houri of Muhammad's paradise ever afterwards. Some black-eyed girl, indeed! Why, her eyes were dark-brown, and her voice was low, and had filled his soul with sweet longings when she said, "You forgive me," and her hand,

when returning the pressure of his, how warm and soft it was !

Why, what had happened to him to-night ? How his mind was wandering and always returning to Dolly—little Dolly—the child had saved his life , and instead of showing gratitude, he had just been chiding her. What a brute she ought to think him—dear Dolly.

Ah, that was her step going down the passage to her room. He must not think of her more ; he would look at the day's news, and then, like Dolly, go to bed himself. He was glad she slept not far from him. He liked to think he was near her in case of burglars or fire.

He took up the *Civil and Military Gazette*, but at the end of ten minutes or so of eye-perusal, he found he remembered nothing—nothing. He threw the paper down, and in so doing struck his knuckles against the edge of the table. He regarded his hand to see if there was a mark ; no, but her hand had lain in it half an hour before, and he was sitting in her chair. Had she or her chair bewitched him ? Sweet Dolly ; he would sleep better if he could see her, just to thank her from his heart for her act of devotion that morning. But that was impossible , she would be asleep by now.

He lit his candle, turned out the lamp, and started down the corridor to go to his room, which lay beyond his official sanctum.

As he approached Dolly's door, he saw a glimmer

from the chinks in it, streaming feebly on the floor of the dark passage. His heart bounded. She was not yet in bed then—the dawdling child—or perhaps she was reading in bed—naughty Dolly. He paused outside the door. No sound was audible. On the impulse of the moment he knocked softly.

"Come in," was the prompt reply.

The voice thrilled him; the unexpected invitation compelled him. He put his candle down, noiselessly turned the handle, and in a tremor of apprehension at his boldness stood inside. In a glance he realized all, and was relieved. She was not reading in bed, but on a chair by it were her tea-gown and some other articles of clothing, and she herself, robed in a becoming pink wrapper, was seated at her dressing-table brushing out her long dark hair.

Fascinated, yet fearful, he stood still.

"Well, Ayah, what is it?" asked the girl, without turning her head.

"It is I, not the Ayah," explained the man awkwardly, in a voice which he hardly recognized as his own.

She started and faced him, paling from sudden agitation.

"You, George!" she said in surprise. "Is anything the matter?"

"No, nothing."

By this time she had risen and gone towards him, buttoning the dressing-gown over her chest as she advanced. He stood waiting in stupid silence.

"Did Mary send you?" she inquired in continued wonderment.

"No; I could not go to bed without thanking you for what you did for me this morning, that is all."

"It was nothing, George; but how strangely you speak. What has happened to your voice?"

"I am nervous, I suppose."

She regarded him curiously, and he saw how pale she was.

"I have alarmed you, I fear. You are colourless," broke from him, and he took her hands in his, and continued, "Why, you are trembling."

"Yes, I expected the Ayah, not you; and for the moment you made my heart beat, as I did not recognize the voice. Nothing frightens me, as a rule; but to-day everything is different, so that, I suppose, is my excuse for not turning you out of my room at once"; and as she spoke a certain shyness came over her.

"You need not be afraid of me. I am old enough to be your father, child, and I so wanted to thank you."

He said this in a low, vibrating voice, whilst still retaining her passive hands in his.

"I am not a child. I'm grown up, and was nearly married, as you know," she objected, with a touch of petulance in the protest.

"You are a child to me, and now that I look at you, I declare you have grown smaller since dinner."

"I have no heels on now; that is the reason.

Look," she explained naively, holding out a small stockingless, slipper-encased foot for his inspection.

He saw it, and lost his self-control, for suddenly relinquishing her hands, he slipped an arm round her slight yielding figure, and drawing her to him, kissed her passionately on the lips.

The surprised girl freed herself almost instantaneously from his tempestuous embrace, and recoiling, cried hysterically, "Go away—I hate you—I hate you. Now, go."

"Yes, I am going; I am sorry, but you will forgive me first, won't you?" he implored humbly, quite as frightened as she was, his momentary madness cooled.

"But why did you do it?" she asked, relenting a little, curious to have his reason.

"I could not help myself. It was the foot, I think," he replied, quaintly abject.

Dolly, though still indignant, was inclined to laugh, but preserved her dignity and merely said: "Go; go at once. In future I shall lock my door. I shall never believe you again."

"Good-night. I am ashamed of myself," he said, hand on door-latch.

"Good-night. I forgive you—there go," she replied in a low voice, her face and neck aflame.

He went away, and she locked herself in. He took up his candle and moved to his room in a whirl of conflicting feelings, angry with himself at his outburst of uncontrollable passion against the defenceless and unsuspecting girl, yet exulting at the success of his madness, as proved by her for-

Chapter VI

CATALOGUING

A FEW days passed, and to outward seeming the *ghāzi* outrage and its consequences had not changed the mutual relations of the inmates of the Residency towards each other. The two ladies had been drawn closer together, if that were possible, and Mary was certainly more with her husband than before. As for Dolly, she now rather avoided being alone with him, no longer challenged him to a game at billiards after dinner, or gave him opportunities for unobserved *tête-à-têtes* with her.

One morning, whilst George was in office, it occurred to Mary that she ought to have a house-cleaning, Christmas week being at hand when the Residency would be full. She commenced operations by taking Dolly on a tour of inspection throughout the house, beginning with the occupied rooms. They went through the day and night nurseries, Mary's own bedroom, which adjoined the latter, and a couple of small spare rooms beyond it. Then they passed down the passage which connected the two wings of the house, looked

into Dolly's room, and going quietly past George's office entered by a back way a large airy room, which Dolly had hitherto vaguely supposed to be that in which the records of the agency were kept.

"Don't talk loud, dear," whispered Mary, finger on lip, as an exclamation of surprise broke from Dolly, "George is at work in there," pointing to the office. "Yes, this is his bedroom. It's convenient for him, is it not, as it opens into his office?"

"And does he sleep in that small camp-bed?" asked Dolly, ignoring the question.

"Yes; it is his old bachelor-bed, he tells me," was the satisfied answer.

"Then you have separate rooms," exclaimed Dolly, doubting the evidence of her eyes and ears.

"What can you mean?"

"Why, that you don't share your room with George, but live like brother and sister. That is what I mean," said out-spoken Dolly, a fine scorn in her voice.

"What funny notions you have, child," was Mary's snubbing comment.

"Have I? I suppose I'm wrong," sighed Dolly doubtfully, "but I always thought married people were really married."

"I have a baby," retorted the wife, as if that fact were a complete refutation.

"Well," continued Dolly, ignoring the baby argument and pursuing her own reflections, "if I could only keep Jack Hargraves at the distance

you keep George, I should not mind being his wife —even now."

" You've succeeded admirably without being married, dear, in keeping him at a distance, for by all accounts he's in Africa," broke from Mary, stung by the implied censure in her cousin's words.

Whilst they were still sparing they had raised their voices. The door from the office was opened and George's head appeared. His wife's last words must have reached him.

" I thought I heard you speaking, Mary. I hope nothing is wrong," he remarked composedly, with a deprecating glance towards Dolly

" We are going to have a cleaning up, and you are to be turned out, and we are discussing how to do it, that's all," was the girl's ready explanation.

" You won't mind, dear?" asked Mary dulcetly, thus aiding and abetting Dolly in her pious fraud

" Oh, no, put me anywhere," he replied after a pause, a suspicion of bitterness in his voice, a cynical smile about his lips. As he was shutting himself into his office again his eyes sought Dolly's, and they responded with a look of pitying intelligence which was balm to the bachelor-husband's feelings. Girl though she was, Dolly had read novels and been in love, and she had understood.

Mary was too occupied with her own introspection to notice the hardness in her husband's voice, or the shade of vexation on his face. Her cultiva-

tion of what she regarded as the higher life in herself, and, as she believed, its successful inoculation into George's less spiritual nature, had, so to say, perverted some of her womanly instincts. Her recent conversation with her husband had agitated and depressed her. Dolly's remarks had shocked her, and yet Bible, marriage service, the facts of life, the observations of all students of sociology, the daily revelations of the home and Anglo-Indian press, all seemed to demonstrate the triumph of animalism in nature, human as well as brute ; and yet she was convinced that her aspirations were right.

She held that it was her duty—the duty of every educated being of light and leading—to act up to their high ideal, and strive by precept and example to assimilate life on earth to the pure communion of life hereafter. George was good and noble, and though he sometimes relapsed in words, in deed he had already attained her conception of nineteenth century *nirvana*, and as for Dolly, though she had been engaged to be married, her whole nature, and the remark she had made about her fugitive *fiancé*, proved that she did not know what passion was.

Of the three she, Mary, had been the real backslider that morning. She had lost her temper, and with Dolly, too, who had saved her husband's life, and all because the meddlesome inquisitive child had parrot-like made comments she must have picked up, without understanding, from some trashy novel. Why, how could a girl really com-

prehend anything about marriage? It was too absurd. Well, she would be good to Dolly, and try and get George to take more interest in her. The two had been close friends at first, but, curiously, the very fact that he was under the greatest of obligations to her seemed to have turned him from her. Dolly was now far more with that Lorimer boy than with George; possibly that had offended him, and he now thought her less worthy of his friendship in consequence.

Mary spoke to George on the subject, and he said enigmatically he was just as fond of Dolly now as before, but she did not seem to care for his company; he could find other occupation than sitting alone in the drawing-room with a book, or smoking in his museum. He should like occasionally to drop over to mess after dinner, and take a hand in a rubber, but if he did so, Dolly might be offended. After all, he owed her his life, he would propose a game at cards or something that evening, and Mary could see for herself how Dolly would take the proposal.

Dinner over, Mary treated them to some music, after which her husband, according to his declared intention, asked Dolly to play piquet with him. No, she was disinclined for cards. Well, would she read to him, or play billiards? No, either would be too much exertion after a tiring day.

"Well, then," he said, rising abruptly, and thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets, "come to my museum, and see my last purchases. You can survey them from an easy-chair."

"What? go out in the cold to sit in a summer-house in midwinter. No, thank you," Dolly objected, with the semblance of a shiver.

"I have just had it connected with the house by a covered passage, so you need not go out at all. You get to it through my office den."

"What a sybarite," said Dolly, letting her large eyes rest approvingly on him.

"There is a fire in it," he added eagerly, perceiving signs of wavering in her; "I often smoke there at night."

"What is there to see in it?" she asked, her voice faltering.

"Some half-dozen camel-loads of Buddhist antiquities just arrived. I want your help in cataloguing them."

She still wavered, and changed her seat to one beside Mary's—to protect herself against his influence probably.

"Go, dear, and help him. It will interest you both," urged Mary, her hand stroking the girl's pretty brown hair.

"You wish it?" she asked almost inaudibly.

"Yes, child, of course."

She rose with a sigh of resignation, a strange elation pervading her, and after giving Mary a good-night kiss turned to George, and made the curious remark, "It is fate; I cannot resist it."

"Oh, there is no compulsion," he assured her, knowing the victory was already won.

"Go, dear. Be kind to him to-night," urged Mary again.

"I'm ready, George," said Dolly. "Shall I bring paper and a pencil?"

"There's everything there," he replied in a steady voice, though his heart was bounding and his face was flushed.

He said good-night to his wife, and then conducted Dolly through his office, and down the passage of which he had spoken, and opening a door beyond said to her, "Doesn't it look snug?" She saw a small circular room, with a wood fire glowing in the grate, and a shaded lamp on the table. Standing up against the wall at the farther end of the room from the fireplace, were a dozen or more images of Buddha, some full length with sandaled feet, some in a sitting posture, with blank abstracted faces. On the table, and about the floor, were a number of sculptured tablets depicting scenes from Buddha's life.

She stood on the threshold looking in, and said timidly, "I'm frightened, George; how cold and creepy they look."

For answer, he took her hand in his, and led her in, shutting the door behind. She was pale and visibly trembling. He wheeled one of two lounge-chairs towards the grate, and she sank into it.

"Cold, Dolly?" he asked tenderly; and as he spoke he stooped and lifted her feet on to the fender-stool, his eyes glowing on her the while.

"Don't touch me again—please don't," she implored. "Sit there," pointing to the other chair, "we have much to say to each other."

He obeyed, and then in a strange, broken voice

he said, "I've nothing to say, but God forgive me. I love you, Dolly, and you know it."

"And I, what can I say?" she breathed softly, as if to herself, and then paused as in contemplation, looking straight into the fire. Presently throwing a side glance in his direction, she proceeded in the same strain. "I understood myself, I think, when I saw you in danger. I have feared to be alone with you since that night. I could not be false to Mary. But it's all changed now since this morning."

"How, Dolly?"

"Why, father would call you two Trappists," she answered, laughing at the quaintness of her conception.

He left his chair and knelt beside her, and would have suffocated her with kisses, but she chilled his eagerness. "No, no—not yet at least," she pleaded, shrinking from him; "let me speak first. When I spoke to Mary this morning, and realized she had no love for you, I pitied you both, but you most. It was then I changed."

"Changed, Dolly?"

She took no notice of his interrogation, possibly meaning him to draw his own conclusion.

"You mean," burst from him presently, in tones shaken with emotion, "you will let yourself love me a little: to do so is no treason in either of us."

She was still silent, her head averted.

"Dolly, darling Dolly," he continued, possessing himself of her hand; "Mary has always been too spiritual for love. What do I owe her but affec-

tion? And she has it, as Alan has it, for I would die for either of them."

"You—you—but what of me? What of Jack Hargraves?" the bewildered girl objected, still parleying with her scruples, yet knowing how her lover would brush aside the last feeble barrier.

"He threw you over, Dolly," was the exulting answer, "and he has not even sent you a wire, though Reuter must have told the whole world what a heroine you are."

"You mean if we love each other a little, whatever harm there may be is to ourselves alone, is that it?" she faltered, bringing her face toward his and catching some of his warmth.

"Yes, darling," he said, pressing his burning lips on hers; and this time there was no repulse.

Her head fell back on his shoulder, and she half turned round to him to be nearer. A strange delicious languor, the first sensation of which she had experienced that night a week before, crept over her, overwhelmed her. Responsively her arms twined round his neck, and for seconds they surrendered themselves to the subtle ecstasy called love, "imparadised in each other's arms," as Milton has it.

By degrees the tempest of her emotions subsided and with a long-drawn sigh she looked almost shyly into his face and whispered: "I was never kissed like that before."

"Nor I either," he asserted.

"Your heart is still beating so loudly, I can hear it," was her next remark.

"It will never beat in any other way now, Dolly, when you are near," he answered almost sadly; for already the return of calmness had dispelled the sophistries which desire had suggested shortly before as unanswerable argument. She read his thought and in a sense reciprocated it. They smiled at each other with a deprecating, irresponsible sort of guiltiness. Then she turned from him, put up a hand to her burning cheeks, and gave way to tears. He watched her, remorse and passion struggling for victory in him.

Presently he rose from his knees and cried out, "Why, after all it's only kisses. What Tennyson calls 'the rushing together of souls.' "

Just then midnight was struck on some regimental gong outside. She started to her feet, saying, "How late it is," adding, after a pause, with whimsical truth, "and we have not even begun cataloguing yet. The antiquities can wait, I dare say."

"Of course they can," he acquiesced with forced gaiety.

Dolly stood irresolute looking towards the door. He caught her in his arms and their lips met again. When they drew apart she smoothed her riotous hair and regarding him with tender reproach, said, "You are too violent. I shall avoid this room in future."

"Will you?" he laughed sceptically. "I believe it was that line of Browning we read the other night which suggested our testing its truth."

"What line?" she queried.

"How mad and bad and sad it was, and yet how it was sweet," he repeated—"and now I know it is true."

A few minutes later with her lover's last wordless kiss warm on her lips Dolly crept away to bed. She had for the time silenced conscience. As Mary had no warmth of appreciation for George and she had, they had a right to love each other —a little—especially as she had saved her poor lonely cousin's life.

Chapter VII

PLOT AND COUNTER PLOT

AMONGST the Pathans and Biloches of our North-West Frontier a love intrigue is the zest of life to their women; fathers know it and protect themselves against disgrace by honourably selling their daughters at a tender age; husbands know it and keep jealous watch over their wives, for whom to be colourably suspected is to be guilty, and to be guilty is death or disfigurement—nose cut off and lips slit.¹ Like Cæsar's wife the women-folk of frontier Musalmans must be “above suspicion.”

Dolly had not yet clearly realized that in loving George as she did, and letting him kiss her, she was lending herself to what might soon develop into a common intrigue. Even had he been devil enough, at that first meeting in his museum, to take full advantage of her self-surrender, she would probably have found excuses for him and for her-

self as well. In the world's history no two mutually faithful souls have ever yet regarded their passion as criminal, nor has the world ever really condemned them, provided that the aroma of romance lent a scent of sweetness to their mutual weakness. But in such affairs contemporary outsiders and posterity think differently to immediate right-holders whether husbands, brothers, or stern fathers.

Happily for Dolly various causes combined to defer the cataloguing of George's Buddhist antiquities for some weeks after the night of her perilous preparations for that collaborative labour of love. Amongst these causes was the advent of the Christmas week, which meant for the Fitzhughs a large house-party and continuous entertainments, hence George's days were fully occupied and Dolly gave him no opportunities for taking advantage of her weakness. Thus their love-record made no progress. The girl's mind, which in the first discovery of its enthraldom, had dwelt too delightfully on the thrilling emotions of those "meetings of the lips," soon recovered tone, and braced itself to a higher study than that of hedonism. She loved, but like a devoted woman self-sacrificingly! George loved, but like a man selfishly. That was the great difference between them.

During the Christmas week Dolly had noted the wasteful profusion in which her cousins were living and the magnificence of Mary's diamonds; and had become more convinced than before—were

that possible—that they were spending more money than they could afford. Young Lorimer had already hinted his fears, and had put her on guard against Fazl Ali about whose unscrupulous doings he had told her some curious stories.

The man was a Peshaweri, a self-styled Shekh or learned doctor; he had only fifteen years' service, and in that period had built himself a fine house in his native city, and acquired the ownership of a whole bazaar; he was feared and cringed to even by many Pechistanis, and it was commonly believed that any one, who thwarted him, was speedily ruined or even murdered; Lorimer was certain he was trying to get the Resident into his power—if he had not done so already—and believed that a part of the man's scheme was to make it appear that Colonel Fitzhugh had misappropriated public funds for his private uses. Dolly pondered all these things in her heart, and knowing that George used Fazl Ali as his banker, and trusted him entirely, was proportionately alarmed. Lorimer, who was a detective by nature, and, in this particular case, from a desire to serve his friends as well, was only too pleased to find in Dolly a daring and enthusiastic coadjutor. Thus by New Year's day these two were close allies and conspirators, their object being to save George, and expose the nefarious practices of his Munshi or native assistant, as Fazl Ali preferred to be called.

In this way out of evil had come forth good. But for her guilty love—for guilty it certainly was.

equanimity—a wigging from Government, which he thoroughly deserved, and the boredom of having to look into his private accounts. He had faced the latter annoyance by sending for Fazl Ali, and had childishly tried to forget the former by hiding the Government despatch under his blotting-pad.

However, in this case, out of sight was not out of mind. His mental vision, like the Rontgen rays, pierced that twenty-sheeted pad, and imprinted on the sensitive brain every word of the offending letter.

Its sting lay, perhaps, in the sarcasm of the concluding paragraph, in which he was called upon for an explanation, as "the Governor-General in Council was at a loss to understand how all the adult male population of a hill tribe, numbering, according to the latest accepted estimates, not more than 5,000 souls, could be described as 'chiefs.' Further, His Excellency questioned the capacity of any man, whether head of a clan or simple hill-side gilly, to eat half a sheep daily."

"They insinuate I am cheating—fudging my political bills — that is what it amounts to," muttered the Resident to himself.

He fidgeted in his chair, and finally rose and paced the room with knit brows, a fine contemptuous smile playing over his handsome features. Presently the victim of viceregal displeasure stopped abruptly, re-read the message of evil tidings for perhaps the twentieth time, and then, with a sarcastic laugh, tore it into minute fragments. Holding his hand high, as the grain-winnower

that possible—that they were spending more money than they could afford. Young Lorimer had already hinted his fears, and had put her on guard against Fazl Ali about whose unscrupulous doings he had told her some curious stories.

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In this way out of evil had come forth good. But for her guilty love—for

or would soon have become—she would never have entered the lists against Fazl Ali, and but for that rascal's scheming to entangle George, and bend that careless but masterful spirit to serve his evil purposes, her mind would have lacked the outside tonic, which was now diverting her thoughts from George's person to George's purse and fair fame.

And the subject of her solicitude, what was he thinking of whilst all this plot and counterplot was going on round him? Well, he had his work, and his wife and child to consider, and they occupied much of his mind; and Dolly? in a sense she was never absent from his thoughts. He longed for her with all his strong passionate nature, but except that once, when she had almost surrendered herself to him, and he had, to his subsequent self-satisfaction, not wholly accepted the sacrifice, she had given him no further opportunity for regretting his magnanimity. Had she done so he hoped he would still have acted honourably, but he had little confidence in his powers of self-control. The newness of the temptation, and lingering scruples about Mary, and even for Dolly herself, had all contributed to save the girl during the ordeal through which they had passed. But those feelings were now blunter in him, and would not be so powerful when the next opportunity should occur.

For the present he was grudgingly content to let things drift. By her avoidance of him, and a thousand other indications, he knew she cared

for him : that was enough. He was very busy too with his guests, his inspections, his hunting and a frontier complication, which promised under skilful manipulation to develop into a big thing, even though the destinies of India were now guided by a peace-loving Viceroy.

The said complication had arisen in the following way :—

A few days after the young *ghāzī* had been sentenced and deported to India, a messenger arrived with a letter from his tribal *jirga* or council of elders. Having sent in his credentials, which consisted of a scrap of paper, certifying who he was, with various marks indicating signatures, and the smudgy impressions of many badly-engraved seals, he was admitted into the Resident's presence. When inside the room, he opened a knot in his dirty waist-band, and took out thence another scrap of paper rolled up like a ball. This he gravely handed to Colonel Fitzhugh, who, having opened and smoothed it out, passed the precious document to his Munshi, Fazl Ali. That rascal was seated on a rug on the ground upon the left of his master. Fazl Ali glanced over the contents, and, having received permission, read them out in a slow even voice as if he were a reading machine.

Turning to the messenger, the Resident said, "So the elders of your tribe declare that as the *ghāzī* boy was convicted on the evidence of a woman, which in the Koran and its commentaries is inadmissible, he has not had a fair trial,

and demand that his case be referred to a *jirga*
Am I correct?"

"Yes, Ameer *Sahib*," the envoy answered, "they all want to come in, five hundred of them, and have the case decided here."

"Government, I presume, is expected to feed them as guests for a month or so," suggested the Resident.

"Of course, *Sahib*, that is the custom, and they are all hungry up there"—pointing towards Kafir-Kot—"and *jirga* cases take time"

"Well, Fazl Ali, what is your opinion?" said the Resident in English to his Munshi.

"Under Muhammadan law, the demand is reasonable, but the case was tried under the Frontier Regulation," was Fazl Ali's ready but cautious response.

"If I refuse, what will your tribe do?" asked the Resident of the messenger.

"Commit mischief (*badi*=go on the war-path) what else? It is life for a life with us · besides, we are hungry, and strict Moslems. Our crops failed and our Mullahs are preaching," was his prompt and significant answer.

"But I did not hang the boy," objected Colonel Fitzhugh. "I sent him to jail across 'the black water'¹ for ten years."

"We have no jails, *Sahib*, therefore we kill"

"Who wrote the letter you brought?" was the Resident's next question.

"The Mullah Powindah of course."

¹ The term for transportation to the Andamans.

"What, the priest who instigated the boy to kill me?"

"Yes, *Sahib*."

"Then you know he is guilty?"

"May be, *Sahib*, but Mullah Powindah says law is law; hence, as Alayar Khan cannot be judicially proved guilty, he must be acquitted, and I know that your Lahore Chief Court always acts on that principle."

The Resident sat back in his chair and laughed heartily; even Fazl Ali smiled. Could it be that this particular clan of the wild Pechistanis had lawyers amongst them, knew something of the Evidence Act and studied Chief Court Rulings?

At this point, Fazl Ali, who had been regarding the messenger intently, interposed and said something in English in a low voice to his master.

Colonel Fitzhugh started, scrutinized the man in front of him closely, and said to him suddenly, "You are Ghulam Ahmad, the murderer who escaped from jail last year."

"I am; but I was innocent, and was only convicted through Fazl Ali's kindness," was the cool reply, accompanied by a look of deadly hate at Fazl Ali, who sat unmoved staring fixedly before him.

"I give you two hours to clear out of this," said the Resident sternly, "after which time I shall arrest you if I can find you. Tell your protectors there can be no asylum in this valley for outlaws, and that I shall reply by my own messenger."

Ghulam Ahmad departed crestfallen. He had not anticipated discovery. He had let his beard

grow, wore a filthy sheep-skin coat (*postīn*), and aped to perfection the insolent swagger of a free Pechistani. But his disguise and manner had not long deceived Fazl Ali, who was his enemy, and had, both before and during his trial, been active in manipulating the evidence against him.

The discomfited envoy having departed, the Resident talked the matter over with his Munshi, and decided that he would inform the tribe that a deputation of two hundred representatives would be received and honourably entertained, but that if they brought any proclaimed outlaws with them, such men would be seized and imprisoned, and the members of the deputation immediately dismissed to their country.

When the order had been written, Fazl Ali remarked in English, "If you carry out your threat, sir, there will be trouble, as the right of asylum is a point of honour with all the tribes. They all claim safe conduct for outlaws accompanying deputations."

"I am quite aware of it."

"Then, sir, you mean to have trouble?" interrogated Fazl Ali imperturbably, as if the working up of a "little war" were a matter of his ordinary routine.

"I don't care if we do have a general rising," replied the Resident carelessly. "It is about time we had some excitement, and it will be easy to keep things simmering until the ladies go to England or Simla."

"And if, sir," continued Fazl Ali eagerly, "things

work out as you wish, I suppose I may count this time on being recommended for a C.I.E., and promoted to the gazetted rank of Assistant."

His manner and presumption annoyed Colonel Fitzhugh, and caused him to give the man a snubbing answer. "In that event," he said sharply, "I think six months' pay as a gratuity and the title of '*Khān Sahib*' will be about the limit of reward suitable for a mere Munshi and a Shekh to boot."

"You forget, sir, I got no reward for effecting the amicable settlement of the last complication," persisted Fazl Ali, ignoring his master's contemptuous remark, but showing how it had stung him by a heightened colour and a twitching about the mouth.

"Nor I," said his master drily. "I got a wigging, and as you may remember had to invent reasons to explain the magnitude of my political bill. You were responsible for the items you know"—and he looked keenly at his Munshi, as if he really suspected him of fudging the account.

"The vouchers passed audit," remarked Fazl Ali with covert insolence, a superior smile illuminating his yellow face, as he thought with satisfaction of one item of Rs10,000, which had with other savings gone into his own pocket.

Colonel Fitzhugh, ignoring the rejoinder, rose to go, his Munshi having in consequence to spring to his feet also.

"There's nothing more I think," remarked the master blandly, his anger evaporated.

"You have not yet given me a final answer to my question," observed Fazl Ali, sticking to his guns with more audacity than discretion.

He paused for a reply, but received none. The two were now standing facing each other.

Nettled by his master's silence, Fazl Ali continued with the hardihood of a man, who knew he held the winning cards, "I think on reflection you will see, sir, that it is to your interest to accept my terms,—accede to my humble request, I should have said."

"You must be drunk or drugged, you insolent fool. Go!" thundered the offended Resident, pointing to the door with a contemptuous shrug.

"You know best, sir," sneered the Munshi, trimming between submissiveness and rebellion.

With an abrupt salaam he left the presence, and hurried to his lodgings, just outside the cantonment Bazaar. Inside his house he dropped his habitual mask, and vented his spleen in a torrent of vengeful mutterings. "Drunk! am I? Fool! am I? Drugged! am I?" broke from him in words. "A few weeks will show which of us is the fool; the shallow, obstinate *Sahib*, he shall suffer for thwarting the one man with brains about him."

Then, cooling down, he removed his turban, exposing his closely-shaven, boil-cicatrized skull, and calmly reviewed the situation. Reflection showed him that he might have been just a little precipitate; he could implicate his master, no doubt, but he was not quite certain that he might not at the same time involve himself in ruin. Were an

inquiry ordered, the Commission would consist of British officers; the Resident's character stood high, and was he not a *Sahib*, an English gentleman? whereas he, Fazl Ali, was a native, of no family, without friends, but with many enemies. On the whole it would be best at present, for a time at least, to play the obedient slave once more, and whilst laying the train for exploding the mine with full effect at the right moment, make sure that its engineer would not also be blown to pieces.

In coming to this prudent resolution, there was some solid satisfaction in the consciousness that, meanwhile, he would continue to add to his fortune in the various safe ways which he had discovered during his four years' charge of the political expenditure of the Agency.

Chapter VIII

MEN IN BUCKRAM

WHILST Fazl Ali passed the afternoon at home in considering the prosecution of his schemes, his indolent master was enjoying himself at the Residency. As is so often the case with healthy men, blessed with good digestions and not too handicapped with brains or nerves, personal troubles sat lightly on him. Fazl Ali's outbreak he put down to some functional derangement, or possibly over-indulgence in spirits or opium, for it was commonly reported that the man had such fleshly weaknesses, though no one had ever seen him in a state of actual intoxication, whether from liquor or drugs.

Still, all things considered, Fazl Ali's manner and words created an uneasy feeling in Colonel Fitzhugh's mind that he ought to be stricter in his supervision both of Government and his own private accounts. That remark about the vouchers was curious, and might be attributed to fearless innocence or clever effrontery. The Resident shrank from consulting Lorimer in the matter, apprehensive that by seeking the advice of a mere boy he might compromise his dignity. On the

whole he thought he might safely mention his suspicions, or rather weakening of confidence, to his little friend Dolly ; she was true as steel, and, according to Mary, had managed all her father's money matters, and was worth, as the old man was said to have boasted, " five hundred pounds a year to him."

In furtherance of his resolve, whilst he was riding that evening with the two ladies and his guest, Major-General Sir Atwell Pottinger, then at Mankiala on his annual tour of inspection, Colonel Fitzhugh said to Dolly that he wanted to have a business talk with her some evening.

" That depends ; has it any reference to cataloguing ? " she inquired, with diplomatic evasion.

" No ; about my own affairs, you suspicious girl. I am losing faith in Fazl Ali. That's the fact."

" Oh ! I'm so glad. I have never trusted him."

" Well, will you meet me in—in—the museum when Mary goes to bed as soon as old Pottinger leaves us ? " he asked, hesitating between the words, and adding as an inducement, " We can be quiet there, you know, and talk it all out."

Dolly flushed slightly, wondering if he was only tempting her, regarded him speculatively from under the long lashes of her half-closed eyes, thought how beguiling he looked, and faltered out, " I'd rather not, George ; you know why : You would not talk business, but—but—cataloguing ! " and she sighed, the old mad, sad, bad feeling stealing over her.

"I really want your help this time," he protested with earnestness. "It's about my accounts. I'm afraid they are in a mess, and Fazl Ali knows it."

"Oh, that's a different thing," she cried gladly, in full belief. "I'll trust you once more, George—and myself," she added, *sotto voce*, "but on one condition."

"And that?" he asked, smiling with joyful expectation.

"That you first get all your accounts out of Fazl Ali's hands," she said with decision, "and let me have an afternoon to go through them by myself."

"I'll try, Dolly," he promised, after consideration, "but it will be difficult. It will involve my throwing over Fazl Ali entirely, and I should be sorry to do that. The very demand for the accounts implies distrust."

"Hardly," she objected gently; "if he is honest he will readily produce all your private papers, I should say."

He seemed dissatisfied, and rode on in silence. "I wonder," thought Dolly, "if he is afraid of Fazl Ali. Poor easy-going George, I must help him," and she again regarded him, this time with both pity and tenderness.

"George," she said presently, "I'll tell you what I'll do. After the General leaves us, I agree to hear your story of your money affairs first, if you engage faithfully to put the accounts into my hands next day. What a big baby you
 little native."

"I swear it," he answered eagerly.

"It's a bargain then, dear," she said in a low voice, coming close to him ; "but you will be good to me, and—and—have no—cataloguing. Will you promise?"

"I love you too much to hurt you, child," was his only answer, and then the conversation between them ended, and they rejoined Mary, who was riding ahead of them with General Pottinger.

* * * * *

Next morning there was a review of the garrison, and in the afternoon the Major-General, accompanied by the Resident, and several staff officers, started on a surprise tour round the posts garrisoned by the Pechistan Militia—an undisciplined body of eight hundred horse and two hundred foot, whose *personnel* was ever-shifting. Each of the more important hill chiefs had the patronage of a certain number of nominations, and distributed it as was advisable amongst his relations and retainers. Provided that the men and horses passed muster, and were always present, few questions were asked. The Resident nominally, but Fazl Ali actually, drew and disbursed the pay.

The General, as pre-arranged—for surprise visits cannot in fact be wholly unexpected—slept the first night at Janikhel, one of the two largest forts, or rather posts, in the valley, now entirely held by tribal militia. The garrison turned out in full strength, and appeared, both men and horses, alert and passably clean, a fact which annoyed the

General, as it demonstrated that his visit was anticipated. He at once dismissed them, but after dark went round the horses, which were picketed down one side of the enclosure, and minutely inspected them.

Next morning the party rode across the valley ten miles to the other large post, called Kachkot, and found its hundred horsemen and fifty footmen drawn up for their reception outside the entrance gate.

The General moved down the ranks, and spent an unusual time in inspecting some twenty of the horses. He then ordered the men to dismount, and lead their horses by him in single file. He stopped the fifth man, and told his aide-de-camp to feel the animal's off fore.

"Well, what do you find?" he asked impatiently, when the examination was over.

"A small splint, sir, on the inside of the cannon bone."

"Humph! I expected you would."

The next animal overhauled was a strawberry-roan, a mare.

"Have her saddle removed," was the order to the aide-de-camp, "and you will find a large half-healed sore just behind the withers."

The order was obeyed, and the sore revealed.

"How extraordinary," thought Colonel Fitzhugh, "I suppose he spotted it from the animal wincing."

In all seven horses were picked out on various grounds, and commented on by the wide-awake old man. He kept his own counsel, indeed he

could hardly have imparted it, he chuckled so continually, but upon his return to the station he asked the Resident to send for the Munshi in charge of the out-post accounts. He examined these accounts very carefully, and complimented Fazl Ali on the complete and accurate way in which they were kept.

"The credit, sir, is due to the Resident *Sahib*," said Fazl Ali with magnanimous humility, "he is particular about the registers and accounts, passes all horses himself, and initials every entry."

"And you are a mere recording machine, eh?" asked the General, chuckling to himself as if he would choke.

"Only that, sir"

"What do you make out of the militia, eh?" spluttered the General suddenly.

"Make, sir?" queried Fazl Ali, a trace of alarm in his steady voice.

"Well, how are you paid, I mean? An extra duty is it not?"

"I am on the rolls as a trooper, and excused the keep of my horse, so the pay comes to twenty rupees a month," explained the man, relieved by the way the question had now been put.

"It's too little, don't you think so, eh?" pronounced the General.

"I shall be pleased if you persuade the Resident *Sahib* to double it," responded Fazl Ali with an obsequious smile.

"Make it two horses or more, eh?" suggested the

General, enjoying some little conceit, which he kept to himself.

Fazl Ali said not a word ; the veteran General's manner and speech puzzled him; was he serious or quizzing him, or did he suspect something wrong ?

" You can go now," said his master—and he went.

Left alone with his old friend, Colonel Fitzhugh asked what the mystery was. Had Sir Atwell detected an error in the accounts, or what ?

General Pottinger chuckled in the dry saturnine manner peculiar to himself, and when the convulsion had subsided said to his host, " You have not twigged it, Fitzhugh, eh ? "

" Twigged what ?" asked the Resident in surprise, thinking from his friend's manner that morning at the Kachkot Post, and the extraordinary question now put, that the old man must be off his head—touched by the sun probably.

" That Government is paying for a number of mounted militia who only exist on paper—men in buckram, sir. He is a clever scoundrel, that Mr. Yellow-Face of yours, his books are perfect, but you bet he, and possibly some of your so-called hill-chiefs divide not less than a thousand rupees a month between them. I suspect, however, that he collars most of the savings himself. No wonder he is content to do the work as a militiaman, excused the keep of his horse. Ha—ha—ha—the sly dog, but he was not sly enough for me. I read a native through at once, though I never did more than pass the Lower Standard in Hindustani."

"I can well believe it," agreed Colonel Fitzhugh enigmatically ; "but I am still unconvinced. How is the cheating done ?"

"By falsifying muster-rolls and pay-sheets, of course ; it's a trick as old as soldiering."

"But the complement was present both at Janikhel and Kachkot," protested the Resident uneasily, as mystified as ever.

"Exactly so, my friend, but out of the hundred troopers at Kachkot, I spotted seven I had noticed the evening before at Janikhel. They must have been sent on whilst we were in bed. It's very simple unless you are on the look-out to detect it, and, by Jove, I am. I know their ways."

"Great Scot ! what a rascal, and the fraud has been going on all my time, I suppose," exclaimed the Resident ; "what an easy trusting fool I must appear."

"Of course you are," roared the General ; "the system has gone on for years, and would have continued for years more, had I not thought of inspecting your militia."

"I suppose I had better have Fazl Ali arrested at once," said Colonel Fitzhugh doubtfully.

"No, no, my friend ; not so fast," interposed Sir Atwell : "as you sign all the bills—even initial every entry in the registers, as Mr. Yellow-Face was careful to state—you are the responsible man, and Government may call on you to refund all misappropriated moneys. That you and your Munshi went shares in the deception is, of course, impossible. All the same if the fellow is cornered,

and wants to be nasty, he may say so, and he's deep enough to prepare his case well, I should say."

Colonel Fitzhugh felt overwhelmed. Pale to the very finger-tips he asked Sir Atwell what he should do; should he call for a commission of inquiry, or what?

"Don't be in such a d——d hurry to hang yourself. There is no case for a public inquiry yet, much less for an arrest," was General Pottinger's soothing reply. "I do not report my inspections before April, and we are only in the beginning of January yet. I shall now request you confidentially to make certain inquiries in the case of two animals—the grey with the splint, and the strawberry-roan with the sore back. I shall inform you that I thought I had seen them in their stables at Janikhel and on parade at Kachkot. This will give you time."

"Yes, sir," he agreed, like a subaltern echoing the dictum of his colonel.

"When you get the letter," continued Sir Atwell, "you had better admit a capable officer, whom you can trust, say young Lorimer, into your confidence, and send him to quietly ferret out the whole business. Don't proceed to extremities with Fazl Ali until your evidence against him is complete; rather throw dust in his eyes as I did."

"Very good," said Colonel Fitzhugh in dejection. "I don't mind this business for myself much, but it's my wife; I'd sooner she were dead than that she should cease to believe in me."

"Tut, tut," cried the fussy, knowing old man, "you take it too seriously. At the worst you may have to pay up Rs10,000 or so; but I've no doubt that by getting Mr. Yellow-Face locked up for a few years, you yourself will come out of the business with credit."

"Thank you for your advice," said the Resident gratefully.

Thereupon Sir Atwell sat down at Colonel Fitz-hugh's office-table, and wrote in guarded terms what his suspicions were regarding the two horses, and requested the Resident to be so good as to look into the matter, and let him know, as soon as he conveniently could, the result of his inquiries.

Chapter IX

BUDDHA'S RE INCARNATION

A FEW days after the General's departure the Resident summoned his assistant, young Lorimer, and told him, with reservations, of Fazl Ali's suspected delinquencies, and asked him in confidence what his opinion of the man was.

"He's a scamp, sir, but has not the courage to be a great criminal," said Lorimer with conviction.

"Well, according to Sir Atwell he is making a large income by the swindling device of drawing full pay for a number of paper militiamen."

"How can that be possible, as I inspect them on the first and second of each month regularly?" inquired the sceptic Lorimer.

"It's the regularity of the visits that makes it so easy; so Sir Atwell says," observed the Resident reflectively.

"Possibly," acquiesced Lorimer, not wholly convinced; "in any case, I know that General Pottinger has the reputation of always discovering mares' nests wherever he goes. I should respect Fazl Ali more if I thought he was successfully working a big fraud like that. I fancy fabricating

evidence against a native, or, if you will excuse my saying so, manipulating your accounts to his own benefit, as money-lenders do those of their debtors, is about the limit of his audacity."

The latter part of this speech made Colonel Fitzhugh wince ; it was exactly what he feared his Munshi had been doing. However, he kept the thought to himself, and gave Lorimer his instructions for the conduct of the delicate inquiry into the matter of the dummy militiamen.

The boy was delighted with his commission, as it meant a good outing in camp, and was the first bit of important political work which had been entrusted to him. He promised to report results in ten or twelve days. His chief appreciated his quiet enthusiasm and self-confidence, and already discounted victory before the battle had been fought.

Curiously enough Fazl Ali asked for a fortnight's leave the day after Lorimer left the station. He had, he said, to go to Peshawer, to attend a marriage in his family. The application placed Colonel Fitzhugh in a dilemma. He wanted possession of his account-books and vouchers, for not until he had them could he claim that promised meeting with Dolly in the museum. If he made the demand now, Fazl Ali might take alarm, or invent excuses, or not go on leave, and his absence at Peshawer would leave Lorimer an open field whilst carrying out his inquiries.

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Chapter IX

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After some deliberation the Resident graciously consented to his Munshi's request.

"You may have the fortnight," he said, "but I am anxious for a settlement of my accounts before you go, so you had better leave your papers with me."

"But, sir, they are not written up to date yet. I shall be back before pay-day, and I promise to produce them then."

"Let me have them as they are, then," growled Colonel Fitzhugh obstinately, remembering Dolly's lips.

"As you will, sir," acquiesced Fazl Ali with a covert sneer; "but they are partly in vernacular, and, until examined and translated, wholly unintelligible except to a trained native accountant."

* * * * *

So Lorimer departed on his work and Fazl Ali on his, whatever that really was, and Colonel Fitzhugh, Resident in Pechistan, sat at his office table, his much neglected accounts before him. He was thoroughly satisfied with himself and fairly easy about his position. Young Lorimer would quietly correct anything wrong in the system of militia recruitment; Fazl Ali would on his return be transferred or dismissed, or perhaps arrested and tried for malversation, and meanwhile Dolly would be his for an hour, and would by her cleverness unravel the confusion into which his accounts seemed to have got. Yes, by a little tact, a little firmness he had succeeded in putting his affairs in train for arrangement all round.

Thus thinking, he lit his cheroot and began in a

lazy, inexact sort of way to glance through the bundle of papers in front of him. He had better, he thought, know something about these infernal accounts, as after all Dolly might ask him questions on them, and what a fool she would think him if he could not say whether he had overdrawn his credit balance by 500 or 5,000 rupees. How confusing and unintelligible the papers were to be sure, the figures were in some native character—Gurmukhi probably ; the words were in Persian, and one neatly arranged packet was in English. Vouchers were they ? No ; great Scot ! they were orders addressed to Fazl Ali to pay demands for cash, for drafts on Calcutta, and so forth, some for thousands of rupees, and in several the instruction was that the money should be advanced from the political fund to be subsequently recovered from his pay. Good God ! that was felonious ; it was technically criminal misappropriation. Could he be guilty of that ?

Beads of perspiration formed on his brow ; his throat was parched ; he longed for drink—stimulant. He went to the cabinet in which he now kept a bottle of old brandy, and pouring out a glass gulped down a full measure. It quickened his perceptions and gave him courage.

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ” he laughed, resuming his examination, “ I never wrote such orders ; not one of them is in my handwriting ; the very signatures are not mine. Stay, but below each signature are the words, ‘ true copy,’ above some office clerk’s initials. The cunning devil would not

trust me with my own accounts, and so has made copies of my orders on him ; they cannot be true ; I cannot have been the careless fool these papers proclaim me to be. But hold, here is another packet marked, 'To be kept in safe.' Why, I wonder ? "

He untied the tape which held the contents together, and discovered that they were the originals of his orders, the copies of which he had first seen. *Most of them were in Fazl Ali's hand, but there was no mistaking his own sprawling signatures.* By some stupid oversight Fazl Ali had not removed these from the bundle. The Resident's first inclination was to burn both, but on second thoughts he locked his later find up in his confidential box.

"I have you on toast now," he chuckled, and then the easy optimist, intent on the present, having first restored the scattered papers to some sort of order, went off in search of Dolly and found her with Mary in the day-nursery.

On his appearance Alan looked critically at his father, and being satisfied with the inspection asked, "Office over, daddy ? "

"Yes, my boy."

"Then daddy come to p'ay with baby ? "

"Of course, scampy."

"Then daddy make ladder, and baby c'imb up and sit on daddy's shoulder."

And forthwith daddy put his legs together and the small man mounted step by step, and having attained his pinnacle amidst warnings of "take

care, baba," "hold tight, baba," from muddy and aunty—as he called Dolly—made his father career about the room until the big man was breathless.

Pausing he said to Dolly, "You shall have the papers to-morrow morning without fail, so I claim fulfilment of your bargain to-night."

"All right, George," she agreed, glancing at Mary.

"Papers, daddy, pictures for baby?" questioned Alan, pulling his father's hair to command his attention better.

"No, scampy; stupid accounts, sums, one—two—three," explained daddy.

"Baby help too. Baby know sums: two and two make six," shouted baba in great glee airing his arithmetic.

They all laughed, and daddy said he was a clever boy, and deposited him in his mother's lap; and whilst mother and son were loving each other, father and "aunty" made a business engagement for ten that evening in the office room; "but we'll have our talk in the museum, it's cosier there," he added significantly.

Dolly said nothing, but Mary asked why they could not sit in the drawing-room, they would not disturb her, and she would in any case go to bed soon after ten.

"Yes, George, the drawing-room will do as well," urged Dolly eagerly, in her heart of hearts probably favouring the quieter retreat, if only she could trust George and—herself.

"Impossible," exclaimed George, "the accounts are in the office room, and we cannot have a litter of papers in the drawing-room."

"Oh, then, you have got them already," cried Dolly, relieved. "May I see them at once?"

"I have to get them in order for you first," exclaimed George grandly.

Mary marked the speech and appreciated his consideration. Dolly marked it too, and laughed to herself at his cleverness, knowing that his arithmetical powers were hardly superior to those of his baby.

So the fateful appointment was made, and George in high good humour went off to get ready for a game at rackets, leaving the ladies to receive certain children with their nurses who were coming to tea with Alan.

As he stood in the verandah in flannels waiting for his pony to be brought round, Dolly felt herself drawn to speak to him. She recognised with shame that in her thoughts about her coming interview with George two desires were influencing her: the earnest wish to help him out of his difficulties, and an indefinable longing to taste again—just for a moment or so this time—the joy of his lips on hers.

Touching his arm she said to him, "About to-night, George, you will be good, won't you? I do want to help you, so help me, please, and don't make it too difficult."

"What an apprehensive little girl it is," he replied with a low laugh. "Of course I'll be good;

and we'll dish that schemer, Fazl Ali, you bet. Good-bye ; there's my pony."

She watched him mount and ride off, stood pensive for a minute or two, then slowly returned to Mary. For the next hour she behaved like a light-hearted school-girl, joined in the games of the children, and by her merry talk and laughter imparted some of her effervescence to Mary herself.

* * * * *

Immediately after dinner George withdrew to his office, "to work through his accounts," he said, and punctually at ten Dolly opened the door and stood before him, the provoking piquancy of her radiant face subdued by secret misgiving that George might not be wholly true to his promise.

He rose at once. "How good of you, dear," he said quietly, taking her hands in his. The touch thrilled them both. He drew her towards him ; their lips met in the long-hungered-for kiss. Was this the end of her good resolutions ? Was this the way he kept his promise ? No, no ; she would conquer her weakness. She drew back her head and cried, "Let me go," then fainter, "Please let me go." She struggled a little. A happy inspiration seized her : "There's Mary coming," broke from her breathlessly.

He started and released her, looking guiltily towards the door. His haste, the comical change in his expression, the absurdity of his fright—and all about nothing—so tickled Dolly that she burst out laughing. The feeling that she was

making fun of him cooled his ardour at once. There was no more amorous sentimentality in him now.

Still laughing and showing a bold front, though really nervous, Dolly said, "I shall go back to Mary; you have broken your word. You think you can treat me as you have your accounts, disrespectfully."

"Don't go, Dolly," he begged piteously.

"Well, apologize then," she ordered.

"It was only grace before meat," he insinuated, with a feeble flicker of a joke.

"I only say grace after meat,—sometimes," remarked Dolly with her grandest air, her audacity rising with the conviction that she was now mistress of herself and of him too, for that matter; she could bring him to his knees by a word or a look.

"Well, there's the meat," he said, humbly pointing to the bundle of papers, and feeling that she had escaped him—his power over her had gone for the time at least.

"Shall we sit here or go into the museum?" she asked suddenly, ignoring his remark.

"Well, there are no easy chairs here to-night, and the museum is more comfortable."

"All right; come along"—and she started down the little passage, he following.

Once in the room she did not relinquish the command for a moment, but ordered him to sit in one of the two lounge-chairs and not move from it without her permission. She herself took possession of the other. The terms and conditions

being settled, she asked him to begin his statement.

He obeyed her, and made the best he could of his sins of omission and commission. He shrank from telling her the full extent of his carelessness, laid all the blame on Fazl Ali, and made no mention of the orders for advances from political funds.

Even so, his self-indictment was black, and caused practical Dolly to think pityingly of Mary,—and this was the man whom the two women had loved, each in her own way; aye, and did love still. His very weakness endeared him to Dolly's strong womanly nature, he was so handsome too, and as for Mary, her transcendental illusions, her idealism and absorption in Alan had so far made her blind to most of his shortcomings.

When convinced that she had extracted all that he was prepared or possibly able to communicate, Dolly summed up the case.

"So, George," she said, "you have not seen your accounts for more than a year; you have trusted everything to Fazl Ali, and you admit you are in debt, how much being dependent on his honesty. By your own showing, you are a pretty big baby."

"Don't hit a fellow when he is down," he protested, and went on, his usual optimism asserting itself, "I have no doubt it will all come right in the end, especially with you as finance minister."

"Well, I'll take charge to-morrow, and carry the

whole bundle to my room at once," she announced, rising to go.

As she did so they both heard a slight noise in the farther corner of the room, where the shadow from the lamp-shade darkly outlined the images of Buddha, which were standing against the wall.

"What was that?" she asked, startled.

"A rat, I expect," he replied, whilst intently regarding one of the placid stone figures, whose sleep of ages spent in smug self-satisfied contemplation seemed to have been disturbed by the night intruder.

Dolly's attention was fixed on the same object. She had involuntarily retreated to where George stood by the fireplace.

There was silence for a little, only broken by the regular ticking of the clock.

Suddenly Dolly's heart gave a bound ; but with extraordinary self-control, instead of crying out, she whispered to her companion, "It's alive : I saw its right hand move ; there's something shining in it. There, the eyes blinked."

"You are right : it's a man," he said rapidly, and rushed across the room, whilst at the same instant this particular Buddha seemed galvanized into full life. Rising from its sitting posture the figure sprang towards the back door, through which the sweeper alone was in the habit of coming. At the door the fleeing saint and the pursuing man grappled with each other, but Buddha who was small, as all the best images are, eluded capture, and slipped out into the night. George dashed

after it, but Buddha, being a God perhaps, vanished into space, and George being a mortal, and unprepared for aerostation, or running over sharp stones in patent-leather shoes, presently returned.

Dolly had meanwhile taken off the lamp-shade and turned up the wick. She glanced towards George, and saw that his coat-sleeve was torn, and had blood upon it. She pointed to it in silent alarm.

"Yes," he said calmly, "he struck at me, but it was a feeble blow, and easily turned. It's only a scratch, little girl. I'll know my man again, I think, as when we were struggling I saw a large scar on his forearm, from an old boil, I suppose."

Between them they got off his coat and pulled up the shirt-sleeve. On the forearm was an ugly gash which was bleeding freely. Dolly's clever hands were not long in bandaging the wound with their two handkerchiefs. Throughout the operation she was pale and troubled, whereas he remained composed and cheerful.

"It's been a night of adventure for you, has it not, dear?" he said, when he had assured her the arm was comfortable and the bleeding nearly stopped.

"Who was it?" she asked, not heeding his question.

"I am puzzled," he answered, "but he was a small smooth-faced man, and made an uncommonly good Buddha. My suspicion is that it was Fazl Ali."

"Come to play eavesdropper," she said, adding with tenderness, "or murder you, George?"

"Oh, no," he assured her, laughing, "he would not have the pluck to try that game. I think he must have discovered he had left some papers with me by mistake. *He was after them I expect,* and was waiting here until we cleared out of the office-room. He probably expected to find the office unoccupied, and had no choice but to hide. Our move here disconcerted him, so he had to sit against the wall as long as he could. It must have been purgatory to him, poor devil. I'll tell you about the papers he came for to-morrow."

"Do you think he heard all we said?" she asked apprehensively, with a return of colour.

"Yes, baby, but there was no cataloguing to-night—in here at all events."

"No, we only talked accounts to-night," remarked Dolly with satisfaction. "What a bad character you gave him; but 'listeners never, etc., etc.,' you know."

"Well, it's he who has begun war literally to the knife, not I; but I think I have him now. It was your declaring you would carry off the papers to your room at once made him move; I expect the news sickened him."

"Poor George," commiserated Dolly, feeling the bandages to make sure that they were not too tight; "they seem all right, but you had better send for the doctor, and I'll go to bed. Mary must hear nothing until to-morrow."

"You are right."

"Good night, dear George. I am quite fond of you again," she said gently; "but not, I think, quite in the old way."

"Dolly!" broke from him reproachfully.

"I mean it. I think the events of to-night have sobered me for good," and she held up her face to his, saying with whimsical humour, "It's hardly grace after meat this, yet it's a thankoffering."

He kissed the upturned face, not a trace of passion in his lips.

As he opened the door for her he remarked sorrowfully, "Mary first, then you; there's nothing lasting in woman's love: it soon turns to cold affection."

"Don't be so unjust," she pleaded piteously; "you know I did care for you both ways and—and—could do so now, only it's wrong, and I do want you and Mary to love each other again. I do want to be good for both your sakes."

Tears stood in her eyes as, candle in hand, she went to her room.

When she had gone, Colonel Fitzhugh, who had lost a good deal of blood, and was beginning to feel his arm painful, went to the dining-room and drank a pretty stiff whisky and soda.

He then roused an orderly, told him to go to Fazl Ali's, and report if he was at home or had started on leave yet, and having ascertained the fact, to fetch the Assistant Surgeon, Dr. Chatterji Bose, a Bengali, in charge of the Residency Dispensary. Having given his orders he returned to his office-room, to there await the doctor.

The events of the last hour, and his wound, cooled his hot blood. Conscience ventured forth from its retreat, and partially revealed him to himself. He had without a struggle yielded himself to Dolly's fascination, had worked on her warm impulsive nature, had taken advantage of her defencelessness, her morbid craving for love and distraction, due to the desperation of the *spretæ injuria formæ*—had easily persuaded her that they were both equally to be pitied, that wrong was right, as Mary's kisses were cold, and then had come that first night of delicious madness and its train of consequences.

By degrees Mary's pure influence, the girl's awakening to her danger, her striving to conquer her weakness, her discovery of his pecuniary embarrassments, had brought about in her an almost miraculous conversion. He did not call it so to himself: he merely recognized the completeness of the change, and dimly traced out the causes. No weaker term than "miraculous conversion" conveys the resolution in a woman's mind, when after dwelling for weeks on soft thoughts, it suddenly turns to absorption in aims of altruistic duty; and what renunciation could be higher or purer than Dolly's? Loving George, she had now renounced self, and sought only to extricate him from his difficulties, and re-create in husband and wife that tender relationship which she supposed must have existed between them in the early days of their married life.

He realized the sacrifice that Dolly was making,

for he knew she loved him passionately, and he in his present repentant introspection—partly traceable, no doubt, to loss of blood—recognized what a poor mean sinner he had been. Dolly knew him as he was, and loved him—he blessed her for that. Mary did not know him, yet in her sisterly fashion loved him for what he was not—he worshipped her for that.

He vowed to himself, with reservations, alas ! he would mend his ways, and live a higher life, be less unworthy of Mary's trust ; and as to Dolly—ah ! there was the rub. How could he change to her, the sweet girl who had saved his life ? That was his dilemma, as it has been of thousands of other men, who would be virtuous if only there was no strong temptation to be otherwise in the person of one particular affinity.

His circular mode of thinking was interrupted by the arrival of the assistant surgeon, who dressed his wounds, and after the manner of his clever but loquacious countrymen, asked many questions. Understanding that the wound had been inflicted by some desperate burglar, who might still be prowling round the house, he literally declined to go home till morning, so a bed was made up for the timid Babu in the museum.

Before Colonel Fitzhugh retired for the rest of the night, he had learnt that Fazl Ali had not been seen in the station since that morning, when it was said he had set out for Peshawer. As he had not taken a seat in the mail-tonga, he must

have started on horseback by the direct, but unsafe route over the hills.

The news hardly surprised the Resident. He was very sleepy by now, and after all it did not matter much, as he held all the pay-orders, both originals and copies. As he put out his light and pulled the clothes up about his ears in his narrow camp-bed, he hazily assumed that Fazl Ali must have doubled back in the evening. "A precious sell it has been to him, though," he thought. "I wonder what his next move will be. Any way, I've checkmated Mr. Yellow-Face, as old Pottinger called him."

So thinking, sleep overpowered George Fitzhugh.

Chapter X

A COMEDY OF SENTIMENT

THE wildest rumours were in circulation next morning : amongst others that an attempt on the life of the Resident had been made—he was either dead or dying ; that Dr. Chatterji Bose had been summoned to the Residency at midnight, had fainted from fright, and was still there, refusing to leave without a guard ; that the hill tribes had risen, and were marching 50,000 strong to seize the station, loot the Treasury, release the prisoners in jail, and lay siege to the Fort. As a consequence the more timid of the tradesmen in the Cantonment Bazaar closed their shops, whilst some of the wealthiest offered to subscribe large sums to any public purpose, which the Brigadier-General Commanding at Mankiala might name, if only he would allow them to remove with their families into the Fort.¹

“ What a fuss these silly people are making about nothing,” was Dolly’s comment to Mary as they sat at breakfast that morning and discussed the last news from the bazaar.

“ About nothing, dear ? ” Mary demurred with

¹ See Appendix, Note 2.

gentle reproach. "George was stabbed, and he received his wound whilst trying to capture an armed and desperate hill-robber. Short of killing him, I don't see what more the wretch could have done."

"Well," protested Dolly, unconvinced, "I was there: the man—such a poor little creature he was, too—ran away at once, and made no attempt to fight, and George somehow got a scratch: that was all."

"You never will do George justice," complained Mary with a sigh.

Just then the subject of their conversation entered the room, carrying his arm in a sling, but otherwise the picture of health and cheerfulness.

"How are you feeling now, dear?" asked his wife with tender sympathy.

"Never better. I'm going to drive through the bazaar, just to show those foolish people I'm alive and jolly. Will you come, Mary?"

"Yes, of course, dear."

It ended in their all going—Alan included. By noon the excitement subsided, though every one, even the Brigadier himself, thought it a most mysterious affair.

An Afghan knife, with blood-stains on it, had been found just outside the Museum. Beyond that there was no clue; and the most remarkable fact in the whole mystery was that Colonel Fitzhugh had not raised an alarm, had not even summoned the sentry, who, if on his right beat, must have been at the time within twenty paces of the spot

where the knife had been discovered. The general conclusion was that the Resident knew more than he chose to divulge, but for some reason kept his own counsel, mystification being the rule of the political department.

To Dolly, who was in the secret, the more she studied the tangled web of Fazl Ali's accounts, the more convinced she became that George's surmise was correct. Had Fazl Ali succeeded in recovering the original pay-orders, he would have had George at his mercy, as they proclaimed that high political, who possessed "the confidence of the Government of India," either knave or fool. One point, however, puzzled her at first; the money was spent, but there was little to show for it; George's remittances to Calcutta and elsewhere were not very large, and, even allowing for a wasteful mode of living, he could not have spent on the maintenance of his establishment much in excess of his handsome salary.

The presumption was that Fazl Ali had misappropriated the difference; but whence did he get the money? The Government cash balance was verified every month. What the schemer must have done was to have systematically fudged the Government accounts, and converted to his own use a large part of the political funds. He had evidently protected himself, hedged against discovery, so to say, by making it appear in George's private accounts that the Resident was himself the embezzler, whilst he, Fazl Ali, was a mere clerk, or at most an unwilling tool in the hands of his un-

principled master. That part of his design would now happily miscarry, as he had by some extraordinary carelessness surrendered possession of his proof, whilst his attempt to recover the pay-orders had been frustrated by the accident of that meeting between George and herself in the museum.

The cash balance in the Treasury was correct, that she knew: but there was, she learnt from George, a sum of Rs20,000 held by him as a permanent political advance. If, as she expected, that had all disappeared, and could only be accounted for as mis-applied, she could still perhaps arrange to replace it quietly. Mary's diamonds alone would cover half or more of the deficiency, and surely she would surrender them in such a cause; but how to approach her on the subject was the difficulty. If Mary would help, George could be extricated from his pecuniary embarrassments, and Government need be none the wiser; but the price would be the condonation of all Fazl Ali's villainies. No other course was possible, because, if a commission of inquiry were appointed, and all the facts elucidated, George's incompetence would be demonstrated, and he would be ruined.

Devoted Dolly had spent a week in working out the accounts. She had got those that were in vernacular translated sheet by sheet by clerks in different offices, each doing his fraction of the task independently. She alone held the key to the connection between the various items.

She had thrown all her energy into her self-imposed duty, anxious to know the worst, hoping

perhaps that the result would make her think less of, and more for, the man, who with all his faults was still lord of her heart. Correctly viewed, he was now a broken idol ; his feet were of clay, and yet the touch of his hand still made her pulses beat quicker, and remembered kisses were still sweet.

As she made her final calculations of the probable extent of his real liabilities, and came to her conclusions on the best line of action for his rehabilitation, she threw down her pen—she worked in her own room for greater privacy—and looked vacuously out of the window. The pity of it all, she thought, a great career to be almost wrecked by carelessness in money matters, by a lazy impatience of detail, by a fatal optimism of character, to some extent too by his wife's unfitness for the practical duties of life.

Outside the scene was fair—the carefully cultivated fields, the noble trees, the effects of bright sunlight and dark shadow, the sheen of the river, the domes and minarets of the numerous mosques—but she saw none of these things, she was thinking of George and his troubles. Ah ! there he was walking on the lawn beyond her verandah, Alan trotting by his side, and Mary had just joined them.

He was laughing, and light-heartedly retailing to his wife some remarkable speech of their boy ; no trace of care lurked on his handsome face. Why should he feel any anxiety ? He knew she had taken his accounts in hand ; he was aware she was a good accountant, and had told her a dozen times

lately he was sure that his money affairs would now give him no more concern. She had told him nothing yet : ill news would keep, why should she worry him before it was necessary ? She said to herself she was glad to see husband and wife so often together now. She had kept out of his way of late, and done all she could towards rekindling love in their hearts for each other.

They were happy, those three out there on the lawn, and she was forgotten, she the waif, the refugee, the discarded of Jack Hargraves, aye soon to be the discarded of George Fitzhugh as well. It was bitter, bitter to bear. She had struggled hard to conquer her weakness, and had, she hoped, succeeded ; at least, had made George believe she no longer loved him—in that way, at least—and yet she did—she did, but she would rather die than disillusion him, and yet—and she smiled a ghost of a smile as she recalled the last time he had kissed her, and his fright when she had said, “There is Mary.” Since then she had borne up bravely for more than a week, interest in her task seconding the effort, but now that task was done, and she had time to think. She was desperate : she might cease to struggle against fate and George would be hers again—and why not? he was her salvage, her property :—but no, there was Mary, whom she loved also ; the saintly, passionless, unsuspicuous Mary, that flesh-encaged soul devoid of all fleshly weaknesses : “weaknesses?” was love a weakness? no, it was God-created ; it was man who had made the barriers, and she must submit, or be

an outcast. But, hark ! what was that sound ? was that laugh which reached her, Mary's ?

She rose hastily and stood by the window. Why, what was happening ? George had just set down Alan, and the child was clapping his hands and egging on his father, " Now daddy, muddy's turn. Caddy muddy too," and George ran to Mary and picked her up—stately woman though she was—as if she were a little girl, and carried her, laughing, struggling, and with mantling colour, over to Alan, and deposited her beside him.

Dolly saw it all, and would have liked to join in the fun, perhaps ; but no, the reaction had come : she had realized that she was desolate, forsaken ; she returned to her chair, and gave way to an outburst of hysterical sobbing.

The opening of her door roused her ; she looked up, annoyed at the intrusion, and saw not her mannerless Ayah, but Mary standing before her.

" My poor Dolly, what is the matter ? " cried the intruder.

" Nothing that you can mend," was the ungracious reply, as the girl turned away from her cousin, and struggled to repress her sobs.

" Won't you let me help you, dear Dolly ? " pleaded Mary, kneeling down beside the girl.

" George," she gasped, " he's in debt, and in serious trouble besides. I am thinking how to save him."

" In debt—in trouble," cried Mary, in stricken amazement. " Oh my poor George, and I knew

nothing about it, and you, you are going to save him—again."

Then she pressed her face to Dolly's, and in her turn gave way to tears, and said self-reproachfully —

"It's always you, Dolly; how good you are, though you can't feel for him as I do."

"I can—I do—I love him," broke in rapid sequence from Dolly.

"You love him!" exclaimed Mary in mild astonishment. "Why how is it possible when you always deprecate him, and avoid him if you can?"

"That's why I avoid him," whispered Dolly, ready to confess everything.

"Well, dear, if you are fond of him, I am glad," was the wife's calm comment. "The more you care for George, the more you will try to help him. But what are you going to do?"

"The sum which is short in the treasurer's hands, about Rs20,000, must be made good at once. That is the most important thing," explained Dolly, her business-mind re-asserting itself.

"I will help you, dear," said Mary, with proud satisfaction that for once her sacrifice would be greater than Dolly's.

The girl smiled, hopefully expectant.

"I'll make my diamonds over to you. They are worth £1,000, I believe," announced Mary. "He told me this morning he was what he called, up to his ears in political work, as his hill people are restive and coming to interview him, so it

would not be kind to worry him about his accounts just now, especially as you and I can put them right for him."

Dolly assented joyfully, a load of anxiety removed from her mind. Positively her beautiful cousin was becoming practical, even though her ideas of proportion were still a little remarkable. Evidently Mary considered that by surrendering her jewels—mostly presents from George—she had done her part. In production, between capitalist and workman, the division of labour is always similarly unequal.

* * * *

That evening it so happened that a visiting chaplain, the Rev. Josiah Gubbins, an Anglican priest, was dining. He was a bachelor, and hitherto a professed celibate. But just as heat melts ice, so Miss Dolly's charms had dissolved his frosty view of clerical duty. Beholding her, his cold heart absorbed warmth: hearing her, his senses realized what "the angel in the house" means: touching her hand, he understood the inspiration of love: but—but his conscience raised doubts; he might marry? yes, but if he did, it must be with one of his own persuasion, and was Miss Carew orthodox?—that was the question.

After dinner, both Mr. Gubbins and Colonel Fitzhugh manœuvred to get private speech with Miss Dolly, but that young person was unapproachable. She was intent on extracting a particular promise from cousin George, yet she avoided him: she had perceived the growing amative-

ness of the Rev. Josiah, and in her lighter moods, if otherwise not better engaged, might have led that foolish young priest a pretty dance ; but being at present disinclined for amusement, she gave him no opportunities for wandering farther from the straight path of celibacy. However, as the evening wore on, George and Dolly naturally gravitated together.

"I wish to see you in my office when they go—do come—it is a business matter of importance," he importuned, for he wanted to get money out of the keeper of his privy purse, to buy that keeper a present.

"All right, go away just now," said Dolly, consenting because of her intended communication : she had determined that he must reduce his stable and economize in other ways as well, and she wished him to give her *carte blanche* in both directions.

Being ordered to go, George went and occupied himself with his guests as best he could, seeking to kill time till he should be face to face with Dolly in his office-loom.

The Rev. Josiah Gubbins, who had been watching his opportunity, saw with satisfaction the half-suspected rival leave his load-star severely snubbed apparently. Realizing with a tremor of not wholly unpleasant apprehension that it was now or never for him, he approached Miss Dolly, who was then for once that evening actually standing alone in a shadowed corner of the big drawing-loom.

Emboldened by the absence of vivid light there, and the extra glass of port, which he had purposely drunk when the ladies had left the table, he suddenly presented himself before the pensive, solitary girl, and said eagerly to her, "Miss Carew, at last I find you alone."

"I wished to be so, Mr. Gubbins, but am so no longer," she remarked, icily repellent, annoyed by his intrusion—desecration, she thought—for were not the feet of this traitor to his principles on the very square of the carpet which George had just occupied?

"I did not see you at church this morning," persisted Mr. Gubbins, not taking the hint.

"No, I was more seriously engaged elsewhere," dropped from Dolly, her mind reverting to the accounts upon which she had been working.

"Elsewhere? I hope you are one of us," exclaimed Mr. Gubbins, in pious dread of some confession of heterodoxy.

"Who are 'we'?"

"The members of the church—the Catholic Church I should say."

"I am not exactly a Catholic," she admitted, supposing he meant the Roman stem, not the Protestant branch.

"Then what are your religious views?" he asked, with a voice pitched high from excitement.

"Those of all sensible people," was the provokingly vague announcement.

"And what are theirs?" he demanded, a little dashed by her equivocation and cold manner.

"Kept to themselves," replied Dolly curtly, cutting short further catechizing.

The Rev. Josiah Gubbins retired abashed, extinguished, irritated, more convinced than before his backsliding that for a clergyman the path of duty was to be trodden alone.

Dolly threw a glance of contemptuous superiority at the retreating figure of the presumptuous priest, and thought that George with all his faults was a better Christian than the narrow-souled Mr. Gubbins. For the next half-hour she and George moved amongst their guests as in a dream, each thinking of the impending interview; he with amorous impatience, she with a mind to business only.

When the guests had all gone, she followed George to his office, whilst Mary went as usual to have a last look at her sleeping baby, and put up a prayer for him that he should grow up like his father in other respects, but never, never, get into debt.

Meanwhile, in the office-room, the lovers were together: he, self-confident, expectant; she, depressed, yet hopeful.

He tried to take her hands in his, but she drew back towards the door.

"How hard you have become," he complained, "since your appointment as Keeper of the Privy Purse. Will you never soften again?"

"That is not business," she objected.

"Well then, you matter-of-fact financier, I want my purse."

"It's empty."

"But I have to send Rs2,000 to Calcutta : I must have the money," he insisted.

"I am sorry, but you have not got it to send," she explained, relaxing a little as she had guessed his purpose.

Then, with a rush to get it over, she made her demand. "And what is more," she added, "I wish you to authorize me to reduce some of your useless servants, and half your stable. You have been living much beyond your income and must economize."

"You mean it, Dolly?" he inquired, conscious that she was right.

"Yes, dear, I'm very sorry, but it must be done," she said commiseratingly.

"You must buy my consent, then."

"How?"

"You know—you know," he exclaimed eagerly, thinking that she was yielding, and he took her hands, and drew her towards him.

"Just one, darling," he pleaded, his face approaching hers.

"Poor George," she thought, "it's a cheap purchase ; God forgive me!" He felt her opposition weaken, and he saw the love-light in her eyes as his lips almost touched her retracted face.

Just then the door was quietly opened. Dolly started at the sound behind her, and George, looking over her head, saw his wife in front of him.

"Mary, you here!" he exclaimed in stupid surprise.

"George! Dolly! what does it mean?" broke from Mary in pained bewilderment; and then she paused.

Dolly, quite self-possessed, looked from one to the other—from the saint to the sinner—and was struck by the element of the ludicrous in the situation. "It shall be a comedy, no tragedy," she determined; "and after all, why have a fuss about an interrupted kiss?"

Like a simple maiden the troubler of the domestic peace, with the frankness of conscious innocence, explained: "He wanted to kiss me, only once, he said; and I think I should have consented if you had not come. He had earned a reward for a great concession to me as his house-keeper."

Mary listened gravely, and was almost persuaded to treat it as comedy, but a glance at her husband restored her seriousness. "Dolly may have been as unmoved as her words imply," she thought, "but George never."

There he stood looking guilty, foolish, incapable of speech.

"George," cried his wife, with quiet conviction, no trace of reproach in her voice, "What Dolly may have thought or felt I don't know, as I could not see her face, but yours I did see. In your voice, in your eyes, in your whole bearing there was an over-powering emotion which you have never shown to me."

"I was wrong," he admitted with feeble contrition.

"Wrong!" echoed Mary, a dreary questioning in her tone; "I begin to understand it. What I saw was passion—you were transfigured. I am your wife, and yet you never bestowed such—such animation on me."

"You never gave me the chance," remarked George sulkily, with gathering courage.

"What can you mean?"

"You always froze me, you never reciprocated," he explained.

"Then Dolly reciprocated, did she?" asked Mary, speaking rapidly, a new light dawning on her.

"Dolly is a woman," he answered with hesitation.

"And I?" queried the wife.

"You were always a saint, an angel, a soul guised as woman far too good for common flesh and blood as I am," replied George with humbleness.

"I can't stand this any longer," interposed Dolly hotly. "Mary, George is not too good for you. He asked you to love him and you gave him homilies on the higher culture and all that rot. Yes, I will speak. I love you both in different ways, and it's all your own fault that he and I have been drawn together. You are on earth and his wife, and you live as a saint in heaven where there's neither marriage nor giving in marriage. I pitied him before I cared for him, and he pitied me because he saw how Jack Hargrave's conduct had made my life miserable. I might have run

away with him, your husband I mean, but I never let him ask me. By degrees your goodness won on me, and for weeks I have longed to see you two love each other as you once must have done. George, dear, you shall kiss me, if you like, and before Mary too ; I am not ashamed of caring for you as Mary does not."

George shook his head, and took out his handkerchief, but did not move. He was not prepared for the situation. Mary during Dolly's confession and denunciation had stood quite still, her lips blanching, her eyes lowered. She, not her cousin, was receiving sentence. Judge and prisoner had changed places.

She looked from one to the other in a state of dazed bewilderment. The human heart had been bared to her ; it was filled with emotions and longings which hers had never understood. What Dolly had said must be true. She wanted to get away to think it all out. Dolly's plain speaking had struck home—it was true—true—all true, and she was the offender, not George, not Dolly. In a voice which she hardly recognised, so deep was the strange conflict of feeling within her, she said slowly to her husband, "I begin to see things differently. I blame myself alone for having lost what you have given Dolly." Then she touched the girl and whispered to her, "Come let us leave him. I wish to talk to you. It's all so new to me."

And the two women left the room together, the wife hungering for what she had never prized ; the

girl for what she possessed yet had renounced. An altered view of life and its duties had opened to them both, dating, for Mary, from that hour; for Dolly, from some ten days back.

Each knew clearly what she ought to do; but for each the power to do her duty depended largely on the action of the weak but fortunate man whom they had left alone in that office room.

And he, did he realize the nobility of the two women who loved him? No; all he felt was admiration for his wife's magnanimity—as it appeared to him—and selfish regret that his sunny innocent-wicked little cousin had emancipated herself from her entanglement with him.

Chapter XI

SIC ITUR AD ASTRA

ALTHOUGH it would be hardly correct to say that whilst Colonel Fitzhugh reigned Fazl Ali ruled over Pechistan, the latter's power was very real throughout the whole agency. The apportionment of the subsidies paid by Government to the tribal head-men, the payment of the frontier militia, and the manipulation of secret service money were all dependent on Fazl Ali's good-will.

He had many friends and some enemies, and both feared him. He blackmailed the former, and crushed the latter when they dared to oppose him. His master's indolence or impatience of detail gave him frequent opportunities for the exercise of his peculiar talents, and enabled him to work Pechistan as if it were a silver mine—a going concern in which he was the largest shareholder. He had all the qualifications necessary for success as a clever, unscrupulous Government servant. His natural ability was great; his education of the best; he understood the art of making himself indispensable to the Resident of the day, and he never missed any chance of furthering his two

great life-objects—the attainment of wealth and official distinction.

He had been successful in the former, but had so far failed in the latter. This was due to several causes : his low origin—rumour said his father had been a butcher—his physical insignificance, his very impassiveness of demeanour. His practice of hiding the workings of his busy brain by maintaining an inscrutable imperturbability of expression and even voice had told against him with three successive Residents, the first of whom, an inventor of phrases, had commented to his successor on the man's "sculptured sneer."

Fazl Ali was in fact tolerated and in some ways encouraged by his English masters as a necessary evil—the indispensable man in the Agency—but was not human enough to be liked or disliked. The attitude of each Resident towards him was "thus far and no farther"—to the top of the ministerial ladder, to the receipt of a handsome gratuity for each special services and then enough, not a rung higher, not a fixed rupee more.

Colonel Fitzhugh's two predecessors in office—both failures as politicals who after a short trial had been successively transferred—had regarded him as a clever piece of mechanism, but hardly as a man with feelings and aspirations such as their own. It had never occurred to either of them that such a machine required promotion to the gazetted ranks or an honorary title to keep the thing honest and laborious. Colonel Fitzhugh had much the same ideas, and being a man of good family him-

self, with narrow, old-fashioned convictions about the immutable exclusiveness of caste, he held strongly that a creature of mean birth, as he believed Fazl Ali to be, should not be allowed to push himself into the commissioned ranks, no matter what services he might render.

Fazl Ali naturally thought otherwise. The political service was his oyster, and that oyster he would open, and his knife was his brain backed by a determined will. He had early, as he believed, taken his present master's measure—or the greater part of it—and had concluded that to overcome that master's perverse obstinacy he must be frightened. To this end Fazl Ali had wormed himself into Colonel Fitzhugh's confidence, had encouraged his tendency to extravagance, his aversion from desk-work—particularly in matters of accounts—and his pardonable ambition to accelerate his own advancement by every legitimate means in his power, including an occasional disregard for tribal susceptibilities—a peccadillo of omission which has sometimes driven a frontier tribe into acts of hostility against Government.

The Munshi had of late, on several occasions, hinted pretty clearly the nature of his expectations. He felt that Colonel Fitzhugh was now almost in his power, and as his schemes approached maturity his "sculptured sneer" had more than once expanded into an attitude of almost open defiance. On the last occasion he had, as we have seen, committed the mistake of losing his temper and using threats.

He had at the time some urgent private business to attend to—*inter alia* the baffling of young Lorimer's attempts to discover the militia frauds—hence it had been necessary that he should ask for casual leave, as a few days' holiday is officially called. The request was, as he had expected, readily granted, but before starting he had to produce his accounts, a preliminary which he had not anticipated.

Colonel Fitzhugh's occasional fits of inexplicable insistence in having his own way had of late more than once upset Fazl Ali's calculations. He felt that some new hostile influence was at work against him. Was it young Mr. Lorimer's? He scouted the idea; that spectacled owl of a boy *Sahib* could have no influence over a man of affairs such as the Resident *Sahib* was. Ha—was it—could it be that pretty English Miss, with the moon-face, the gait of a partridge, and the nerve and hand of a Rûstam on horseback. No, it was impossible; she might influence the Colonel *Sahib* by her beauty and excite his susceptible heart, but not his mind. What could a girl understand of man's business matters? The Missy *Sahib* was made for kisses and babies, not for dry accounts.

These were the thoughts which ran through Fazl Ali's mind, when he placed the bundle of accounts on the Resident's table. They were in such a state of purposeful confusion as would make them undecipherable except by a trained accountant.

Several hours after depositing them Fazl Ali had discovered that by some mistake certain original pay-orders had not been previously removed from the bundle ; he therefore returned to recover them, but was caught in the *museum* as has been narrated. *He had only escaped by using his knife.*

Altogether the campaign had opened badly for him.

Circumstances had brought about a declaration of war before the completion of preparations for war, and this unpardonable precipitancy was traceable to an error of temper due to a miscalculation, a misapprehension of fact. He had assumed that Colonel Fitzhugh must be aware he had overdrawn his account, and consequently misapplied Government money ; if so, his master would be complacent, and whilst pushing his own fortunes would help forward those of his obliging and indispensable servant.

But the Resident *Sahib* had not done so, had acted as if he neither knew nor suspected himself to be a defaulter, and had besides treated him, the faithful and meritorious Fazl Ali, with contumely, had scorned and insulted him, and then —well—the worm had turned.

The encounter in the museum had been an accident, but there again it had arisen from another piece of inexcusable blundering on his part. Had he only looked over the packets into which the contents of the bundle of accounts were divided, Fazl Ali would have seen and removed the papers,

to recover which had caused him to revisit the Residency like a thief in the night.

Altogether, on that unlucky night, as he made his way on foot to the place where he had tied his mare, his mental condition was pitiable, his carefully prepared plans had gone awry, his labours of years were undone, and lastly he was possibly a murderer. To effect his escape he had struck at his master with his knife; the very fact that no hue and cry had been raised seemed to show that that master had been too severely wounded to summon the sentry. Fazl Ali mounted and rode away, cursing himself as a blunderer, and revolving new schemes for his rehabilitation, if by good luck the Resident had not identified him.

His fears on that score were soon set at rest, as within forty-eight hours of the affair half Pechistan knew that their "Ameer Sahib," as Colonel Fitzhugh was called, was alive and well, none the worse from a scratch received in a tussle with an undetected burglar.

We may leave Fazl Ali to enjoy the satisfaction which that information must have given him, and return to his master. Notwithstanding his gathering perplexities Colonel Fitzhugh's self-complacent optimism still continued. It is true that as the days went by, and the amount of distasteful routine he had to transact with his own hand increased, he began to think himself an over-worked and ill-used officer of Government. That Fazl Ali and young Lorimer were

both away at the same time was a vexatious coincidence. *Their absence tied him to his office-chair, a seat every man of action detests.*

Though he now knew Fazl Ali was a rascal, he was almost inclined to overlook his delinquencies, the man was so capable and relieved him from so many worries, whereas his substitute was a plodding ignoramus. It was more satisfactory on the whole to work with a clever scamp than an honest fool. This conviction, which is a common one amongst self-reliant Anglo-Indians in high position, was due to the discovery that the officiating Munshi had blundered seriously in his handling of several important cases.

Superadded to this cause of annoyance was another ;—Fazl Ali had applied for a month's extension of leave, as "God and his wife had incontinently presented him with twin sons, and he could not leave them, though he felt his kind master would have difficulty in carrying on the affairs of the Agency owing to his absence."

"Impertinence or not, he's not far wrong," thought the Resident, with a laugh, as he threw the application on the table. It was a new grievance, though it relieved him from the necessity of an immediate decision on Fazl Ali's retention, transfer, or dismissal.

What was he now to do, that was his dilemma ? His office-correspondence was in arrears, his case-work was in a muddle, his digestion was suffering from excessive sedentary occupation, and his troublesome subjects were getting out of hand.

He was still considering the situation when the orderly on duty entered and announced that the "*Chota Sahib*" or "little *Sahib*," as young Lorimer was termed by the natives, was outside and wished to see him.

"Show him in," ordered the Resident, delighted at his assistant's return, though wondering what the deuce had precipitated it.

Greetings exchanged Colonel Fitzhugh showed the boy Fazl Ali's application for an extension of leave and asked what he thought of it.

"It's a lie to begin with about the wife and the 'incontinently' arrived twins; I don't believe he went to Peshawer, and, in the next place, his assertion of self-importance is insufferable cheek but it's just like him," was the downright verdict.

"Take the lie first, and explain," said the Resident imperturbably, "the post-mark on the cover is Peshawer, and I ascertained by wire a week ago through the Deputy Commissioner there that the Munshi was then at his home."

"All a blind, sir," asserted Lorimer with confidence, "I know he has been with Mullah Powindah for days; he is with him now, and is at the bottom of all the mischief that is brewing with the tribes."

"What a remarkable little busy-body it is. I can't help appreciating his versatility; his talent for bold intrigue is in my experience unprecedented." The Resident made this observation in his grandest style, with the tolerance of conscious

superiority, and the admiration which all large-minded men feel for ability however applied.

"You are right there, sir," Lorimer admitted after a pause, grudging the man any pre-eminence.

"Have you discovered what his game is with that fire-brand Mullah?"

"It seems, sir, the two are connected by marriage," replied Lorimer. "Acting as confederates they have been misappropriating and sharing together about Rs1,000 a month of the militia payments. As soon as I went into camp I sent for some of the head-men of the Mullah's tribe, and after much questioning got to the bottom of the whole fraud. They returned to their villages vowing vengeance against their Mullah for cheating them out of their rights. They were entitled, under the orders of Government, to 120 militia nominations, but only received payment for seventy."

"Excellent," said the Resident, "you have done your work well."

"But Fazl Ali has done his better, sir," proceeded Lorimer. "When Mullah Powindah discovered my action, he sent in a hurry for Fazl Ali, and between them they have persuaded the tribe that you are the fraudulent paymaster, not they and consequently their dupes regard me as the, liar, and the Mullah as your scapegoat."

"The devil they do. You are getting interesting," interjected the Resident.

"That scheming impostor, the Mullah," continued Lorimer "instigated by Fazl Ali no doubt

is urging them to send round the fiery cross, and is attempting to inflame their fanaticism to striking heat. He is preaching a *ghaza* (holy war against infidels), and selling amulets against our bullets by the hundred."

"A *ghaza* about what?" the Resident asked.

"The pretext is the injustice of the sentence on your would-be assassin, the youth Allayar Khan. Before committing themselves to hostilities, their full *jirga* is coming in to represent their grievances to you."

"Delighted to meet them, I am sure," laughed the Resident.

"The Mullah," continued Lorimer, "under advice, of course, is anxious that the facts should not be explained to the *jirga*, and will do his best to prevent a settlement."

"On this occasion the murderous priest and the intended victim think alike," remarked the Resident with quiet significance?

"What? Colonel Fitzhugh, you can't mean it? You are surely joking?" exclaimed the incredulous Lorimer, doubting his own ears almost.

"Never more serious in my life," replied the Resident with deliberation.

"You will be lending yourself to the abetment of an armed invasion of British territory. I cannot follow you, sir."

"Not at all. What I mean is, that if these hill Pechistanis are on the war-path, as you say they are, I am ready to accommodate them. I am tired of the monotony of this humdrum life of dull

routine, and the General thinks it is time to test our new mobilisation arrangements in the field. So far they are a mere paper scheme. Our troops should have a camp of exercise on field-service conditions, and if so, I shall have a look in for my K.C.B. There, I have been frank with you."

"And the bill, and the taxpayers?" queried Lorimer.

"Government can reimpose the cotton duties. Nothing simpler, and India will benefit," replied Colonel Fitzhugh airily.

"If that were all, sir, I suppose most of us would feel much as you do; but there's a world of difference between getting up a 'little war,' and merely accepting one with alacrity when it is forced on Government."

"Well, my boy, you will live and learn, no doubt. I would remind you that none of the successful frontier politicals, such as Sir Powis Charivari or Sir James Philipson, ever lent themselves—on paper at least—to what you so crudely misdescribed as 'getting up' a row. What they did was to do nothing to prevent it, and to act under all circumstances as fearless, honourable English gentlemen, who preferred straight-forward dealing with hill-men to the crooked ways of so-called diplomacy."

Now Lorimer knew the unpublished causes of many Indian "little wars," and believed that on our North-West Frontier honest weaklings were worse mischief-makers than designing strong men.

His Chief's discourse had impressed but not convinced him, for he recalled a recent painful incident in our history, when an honest mistake caused a general rising of the Atriedi tribes against our expansion policy. Pondering over Colonel Fitzhugh's speech, he asked :—

"Was the abandonment to the Atriedis of the fortress and pass of Ali Müsa, whilst 12,000 troops marked time at its mouth, the act of what you call 'a fearless, honourable English gentleman ?'"

"No, of a fearful incapable," snapped the Resident ; "but it had its uses."

"Uses!" echoed Lorimer, his indignation roused ; "it and the war which followed cost pauper India nearly three millions sterling, and settled nothing."

"You forget," said the Resident with quiet cynicism, "it gave 50,000 troops hill exercise, medals, and honours, and taught 'our faithful friend and ally,' the Ameer, a lesson in political economy."

"I cannot think of it without shame," burst from Lorimer.

"Nor can any other honourable man,¹ so drop it and return to my Pechistanis. Have I satisfied you that my intended line of action is right?"

"Almost, sir. In any case, I am glad to be serving under a man who will stoop to no weak or mean action, so I think I may say you have satisfied me."

"Yes, my boy, no doubt you ought to be content," his chief answered grandly, smiling at his

¹ See Appendix, Note 3.

assistant's innocence , " I think you will see that I shall do the right thing, but I advise you beforehand to buy yourself a large-bore revolver, and a good hill-pony steady under fire, because I am certain that our Pechistani friends will return to their homes in very bad humour, the visible expression of which will be some treacherous surprise or the burning and plundering of some of the most exposed villages in this rich and peaceful valley."

" Why are you so sure, sir ? "

" Because I shall act in the way I have told you, and such action rarely brings about a peaceful settlement It's not diplomacy , and besides, there has been a good harvest here, but a poor one or none at all in the hills, so our highlanders are hungry. Then there's the grievance about the *ghāsi*—it's legitimate enough under the *shara'* law —and above all it's to Mullah Powindah's interest to fight, and as you make out to Fazl Ali's advantage also. The fighting, which cannot be serious owing to the disparity of weapons, will not last long. The tribes having satisfied their notions of honour, and lost a number of their fire-eaters, will cool down and sue for peace. All old accounts will then be wiped out, a fresh start will be made, and the militia will be reconstituted and increased, and every one will be happy except the Indian *ryot* who pays the bill That has been the history of every hill rising for the last forty years. Government is tender-hearted, and never punishes severely enough, hence risings occur every two or three years."

"Well, sir," said Lorimer, hardly knowing what view to take, "all I can say is that there is here no real occasion for a row. If both sides will only be reasonable, all points can be settled amicably."

"But, my boy, you forget the disturbing factor, which brings about every war—both sides never are reasonable. Sentiment, prejudice, passion, supported by force, rule the world, not reason."

"All the same," objected the boy not yet convinced, "making allowance for their susceptibilities and foolish stickling for points of tribal custom or etiquette, they are very much like other men. I think I could talk them over, and send them home peacefully inclined."

"Perhaps; but it would hardly be 'peace with honour,'" dropped persuasively from the Resident's lips, as he sent his assistant off to the drawing-room to take tea with the ladies.

The boy's insistence on the duty of conciliation, and belief in his own powers of persuasion, were refreshing to the experienced frontier political. Twenty years before he, too, had entertained and attempted to put into execution these quakerish views. He had been a man of peace for the first half of his political service, but during it, being unknown, had got neither reward nor recognition. His attention had been drawn to the careers of the two successful politicals, Sir Powis Charivari, and Sir James Philipson. What he learnt from their examples was that the firebrand, not the pacificator alone, achieves reputation and honour—trans-Indus at least. And then it was always so easy to have

a row if the time were wisely chosen. On this occasion the highland tribes were in a state of semi-starvation, had neither food in their houses nor work in their fields, and besides, they were in a suspicious super-sensitive frame of mind. A mad Mullah's preaching a crusade, the dissemination of the Ameer's latest pamphlet on *ghaza*, a squabble on a point of *shara'* law such as that about which this *jirga* was coming in, any such spark would bring about an explosion. All he had to do was to act as he had preached, be a straightforward, unbending Englishman, and as the representative of the Queen-Empress through the Viceroy of India, stand no nonsense.

Having, with the clear prescience of the old frontier political, discounted the future—the *jirga's* demands, his answers, the subsequent tribal rising, and the Government action—Colonel Fitzhugh mentally detached himself from further “shop,” and spent the rest of the afternoon playing croquet, he and Dolly against his wife and Lorimer.

When the boy-assistant went to his quarters that evening he acknowledged to himself that, notwithstanding many shortcomings, there was something great and attractive about Colonel Fitzhugh. He quite understood why the people had given him the sobriquet of “Ameer *Sahib*”—the master who was feared yet respected, because he was strong to punish, quick to forgive, and always generous. In addition Colonel Fitzhugh was happy, for was he not worshipped by the ladies of his household, and

had he not sometimes the ability of making wrong appear right?

"And yet—and yet," thought Lorimer, "the sword of Damocles hangs by its single hair over his head; and, though he probably suspects the fact, he laughs and chaffs, and enjoys his hour, as if he would live to old age and die a peer."

Chapter XII

THE GREAT UNWASHED

IT was not until the third day after the conversation narrated in the last chapter that the good people of Mankiala began to realize that something unpleasant was happening. The smells of the East were more perceptible than usual, particularly in the vicinity of the two "political" serais. Villainous looking hill-men were to be seen loafing about the station, each with an aura of odour peculiar to himself, yet with a certain family resemblance, as all were wearing sheep-skin coats, in which they had slept, eaten, and moved since the cold season began.

Singly, or in groups, they swaggered about as if the place belonged to them, invaded the cloth-sellers' shops in the bazaar, pulled about their wares, and sometimes sauntered out with a gaudy turban or waist-cloth in their hands, ignoring the formality of payment.

When they met *Sahibs* they walked straight on, thus changing the constituted order of progression; for in India the brown man—the Bengali Babu of Calcutta excepted—steps aside when the white man passes.

On the rare occasions when they saw the white *Mem Sahibs* and Miss *Sahibs* drive or ride by them, they stared rather in admiration than insolence at the fair-skinned women from whom sprang the world-conquering breed of pale-faced men. Their close inspection of pretty Mrs. Blunt—a two months' bride—quite upset that charming woman. When she returned from her ride that evening, and sat down to dinner, she let dish after dish be removed by her white-turbaned waiter without tasting any of the greasy triumphs of her very second-rate Hindustani cook.

"I can't eat, Algy," she complained, with mournful reproach in her voice, as if the fault was his.

"Darling, you must be ill," Captain Blunt insisted, tenderly solicitous, for as a rule his Amy had a healthy appetite.

"It's enteric, I think. I taste it in my mouth," she explained, in real alarm, for she had already learnt that in India a disease of that name connected with smells victimizes new arrivals.

"What does it taste like?" Algy prudently inquired, before sending for the doctor.

"Oh, it's like a whiff from these dirty hill-creatures who stood round me in the public gardens," said Amy, whose powers of analysing sensations were limited.

"That won't hurt you, my pet," cried Algy cheerily. "A glass of champagne will put you all right."

And soon Amy's eyes were sparkling like the Pommery Greno in her glass, and when the sweets

came her anxious Algy was relieved to see that she took two helpings of tart.

Amy's case was but one of many. The sight, rather than the scent, of these hill cut-throats, whilst making wives of frontier experience anxious and disinclined for food, affected their husbands differently. They were talkative, and enjoyed their dinners, fore-seeing the probability of a little active service, and a medal or more at the end of it.

* * * * *

On that same afternoon Mary drove out with her husband down the Mall, then past the Government gardens, and home by what is in all frontier stations known as the "circular" road. This, in fact, was the one metalled drive of the station, and, though beautiful because of its immediate surroundings and the views which opened out at different points, was just a little monotonous.

"The Circular" used rather to bore Mary unless Alan were with her, in which case his original observations were always amusing, but to-day, though the child had been left at home, she was actually interested.

George was her sole companion, and of late he and his affairs had been much in her thoughts. She was tortured by the doubt that she had failed in her duty as a wife. His passion for an ordinary girl like Dolly had caused her much self-searching ; evidently reciprocity, of which they had both talked, was the lever which fixed a man's affections. She now longed to be sole queen of her

husband's heart, yet she could not reciprocate—it was not in her so far—but then perhaps that was partly George's fault; until he warmed whence was her feeble fire to be kindled? She felt no active jealousy against her sunny little cousin, for had not Dolly saved George's life, given him some happy hours, and, beyond conceding a kiss or two, resisted all his ardent wooing? Still—still—she would like to have her husband all to herself.

Well this afternoon she had had her wish.

As the carriage bowled along, followed on this occasion by two orderly troopers, designed to impress the Pechistani mind, he asked her why Dolly had not joined them.

"She had an engagement, dear," was the answer. "She is giving Mr. Gubbins a lesson at croquet, and Mr. Lorimer is helping her."

"Oh, indeed," exclaimed George, his face darkening; "one of them will be *de trop*."

"Not for Dolly," Mary assured him; "she can manage several men at once she says, though I am not sure that she classes Mr. Gubbins as a man."

"I should hardly suppose she would," scoffed her husband.

"But she thinks a great deal of Mr. Lorimer, dear," continued Mary with innocent persistence. "I wonder if anything will come of it?"

"Don't speculate on such an absurdity," burst from George almost roughly, a flutter of pain in his heart, his evil familiar enjoying a momentary monopoly of his expression.

Mary was hurt, and, sighing, turned away her

head. He saw it, and was sorry, and his good angel regained possession of him.

"Forgive me," he said gently. "I don't know why I am such a brute to you sometimes."

His wife slipped her hand into his. He pressed it, and said, "No man could wish for a dearer friend than you are."

The speech stabbed her, yet, only a few weeks before, that was the relationship her high ethical ideal had aimed at establishing between them ; and such a little thing, merely that interrupted kiss, had upset her whole philosophy of the married state.

"We are just going to pass the two political serais, so look out for my lambs," was George's next remark, as much to change the subject as to test his wife's interest in his work.

Mary obediently kept her eyes open, and presently saw some hill chieftains, and in disgust at their vermin-like appearance and ignorance of the salaaming etiquette of the East, said :—

"What filthy savages they seem. They don't even know you."

"They will to-morrow," he muttered *sotto voce*.

"Why do you not put them all into one enclosure ?" she inquired, trying to regard the creatures as human beings worthy of notice.

"I am glad you asked," he answered, thawing ; "you are really beginning to take practical interest in what I do."

"Of course, dear," murmured Mary, all her thoughts on Alan in his nursery at that moment.

"These Pechistani tribes are republicans," proceeded George, didactically, "and live under a form of party government; so to prevent the 'ins' and the 'outs' disturbing the peace whenever a tribal deputation comes to interview me, I allow them the use of two enclosures. Members of the Opposition generally go to the smaller building."

"Are they socialists as well as democrats?" asked Mary, who thought she had a taste for sociology.

"In a sense, yes," laughed George, thinking of certain misunderstandings in the bazaar that morning, "that is, as regards outsiders they make no distinction between *meum* and *tuum*, but amongst themselves they respect private property when the owner is strong in friends."

The carriage was now being driven slowly past the two serais. George's lambs were lounging about, literally wolves in sheep's clothing, as each was, of course, wearing his *postin* or sheep-skin coat. They crowded on the roadway to stare at the *Sahib* and the *Mem Sahib*, whose escort enhanced for them the interest of the strange spectacle. Their unmannerly glances, their hungry cruel aspect, the offensiveness of their persons utterly disgusted George's fastidious wife. Involuntarily she drew close to him, and probably showed by her expression repulsion for the savages surrounding the carriage.

Noting the action and look, a man on the outskirt of the crowd remarked with a loud guffaw that the *Mem Sahib* was frightened. The Resident

turned wrathfully in the direction whence the voice had come. He thus presented his full face, scowling with anger, to those who stood nearest the two enclosures. Some of the elder men recognized him, and raised their hands in clumsy salute, calling out "Ameer Sahib salaam"; others, of the Opposition probably, shouted "No, no, not Ameer *Sahib*, but the *bichū*" (=scorpion, alias Fitzhugh). A roar of coarse laughter met this sally, and presently the two parties began abusing each other in the foulest Billingsgate known to them.

The Resident watched with contemptuous amusement the excited knots of vociferating men for some moments, and then told his coachman to drive home quickly.

"And these are your people," remarked Mary in a rush of sympathy, as she realized for the first time how difficult and dangerous were her husband's duties.

"And not bad people either," asserted George. "Our ancestors the ancient Britons and the Scotch Highlanders a hundred years ago were no better, though less priest-ridden, and therefore less fanatical."

"But we were always Europeans, and they are Asiatics," argued Mary, and she had the last word, for they were nearly home now, and George was thinking of the morrow.

* * * * *

And on the morrow came Lorimer, keen, earnest and hopeful; he had talked over matters quietly

with some of the grey-beards ; they were all reasonable and anxious for peace, but complained that there was a spirit of unrest abroad ; their young bloods had been misled by the wily Mullah Powindah ; the elders had no longer the authority they used to have. It was easier to persuade men to evil than to good ; if the Ameer *Sahib* were firm and conciliatory, all would yet go well. However, the future was in the hands of Allah : what He ordained would happen.

"Allah, or Mullah Powindah ?" queried the Resident.

"Surely one bad man cannot lead astray a whole tribe, it is monstrous," exclaimed the young assistant, his indignation aroused.

"He can, and does, if he's a strong saint like the Mullah. After all, it's the way of the world."

"Then, what is the cure for such wrong-headedness ?" the boy asked disheartened at his Chief's cynicism.

"Blood-letting is the most cooling prescription known," was the Resident's answer.

Preliminaries having been arranged the hill *jirgas* were marshalled in concentric semi-circles under the great Darbar *shamiāna*—a vast tent, like that used by a good travelling circus, but newer and less weathered.

The place chosen for the meeting was the cricket-field in the Government gardens. The members of each deputation were seated in

separate rows on carpets spread on the grass. Those of Mullah Powindah's tribe or section being the most influential, most interested and most disputatious, were placed nearest the chairs to be occupied by the Resident and his officers.

A few constables, under a smart and reliable native police-officer, were on duty in and about the gardens, otherwise all signs of coercive authority were ostentatiously absent. However, as a precaution against treachery or any outbreak of general madness, such as sometimes seizes whole communities on the frontier, a company of sepoy's were at the time, by designed accident, being drilled just beyond the trees about two hundred yards away.

In his dealings with hill-men the Resident's constant policy was to appear to trust them ; but, in reality, he always arranged to have a force at hand ready to act promptly, if necessary. Whether on tour in time of peace, or at a friendly palaver, as this was considered, his instruction to the military officer responsible for his safety, was to act as in an enemy's country. Many thought he carried this principle too far, but his reply was, that every disaster hitherto experienced by us on our North-West frontier had been due to unpreparedness against acts of treachery, hence over-caution was wiser than over-trust.

When every man was in his place, the Resident entered and quietly took his seat. He knew that no hill-man would rise at his approach, hence the awkward reversal of deferential etiquette was

avoided by his coming into the great tent from its canvas side nearest the dais and chairs.

With him were his assistant, young Lorimer, and several officers of the garrison, who had received permission to be present at the proceedings. These latter were in mufti, and apparently unarmed. Each probably had a revolver about him. They had been warned that although every hill-man on entering the station was, according to rule, disarmed, still, as their persons were not searched, it was as certain that each had a handy dagger concealed under his sheep-skin, as that each carried a silver tooth-pick—one of the symbols of being a man of note amongst Pechistanis.

From his chair the Resident took a calm survey of the three hundred keen watchful faces fronting him. The proportion of grey-beards was smaller than usual, a sure indication of rashness in collective action by the assembly.

Amongst the oldest men there a fair sprinkling were noble-looking patriarchs, moon-faced, heavy-bearded men with Jewish noses and soft deprecating eyes, melancholy from long experience of the awryness of mundane affairs, and the foreboding that something untoward would happen that morning. Though elders, and as such the constitutional representatives of their respective sections, they knew that they were powerless to turn the minds of their young men from war—unless—unless their “Ameer Sahib” would be kind, forbearing, and readier to forgive than take offence.

Having rapidly scrutinized his interviewers, and bowed a friendly acknowledgment to some of his acquaintances, Colonel Fitzhugh announced that he was ready to listen to any representation their spokesmen might wish to put forward, provided that it was reasonable in itself and worded in respectful phraseology.

Chapter XIII

A STORMY SITTING

THE Resident's immediate assumption of authority offended the pride of some of the young bloods present, but after seeking encouragement from each other by the interchange of fierce looks and significant thrusts of their right hands under their sheep-skins—they were for the time feeling not for fleas, of which each had hundreds, but for the handles of their daggers—their restiveness was subdued by the up-rising of Ibrahim (= Abraham) Khan, the Grand Old Man of the House.

In slow impressive terms he explained that he and his fellow-clansmen had two demands, not petitions, to make: one was that the youthful *ghāzi* who had been sent over the black water should be released and returned to his home, there being no legal proof of his guilt, and the other that the thousands of rupees, which were theirs by right, but had been withheld—he would not say embezzled—should be paid over to them.

Having ended, the orator looked round for the

approbation of his compatriots, and was gratified by the buzz of applause which met his greedy ears.

At that juncture a hot-headed member of the Opposition jumped up, and announced that his party's demands included a cession of land and free pasturage in the valley. The audacious youngster's impertinence was fortunately not taken seriously by his fellow representatives. Amidst some laughter he was pulled down from behind, and having attained notoriety, consented to remain quiet for a time at least.

This episode ended, and silence restored, the Resident, still sitting, replied with studious moderation to Ibrahim Khan that the boy *ghāzī* deserved death, and ought to have been hanged and his body burnt, for having attempted to commit a cowardly murder, but that out of pity for his youth he had been sent to jail for some years. Further, as to the question of the militia nominations, that was being inquired into, but they must remember that the mounted men had not actually been employed, and that the matter was not one of right but of the *Sarkar's* good pleasure.

"However," he added, "if by error of mine or of any servant of mine you have failed to exercise nominations and receive payments intended for you by the *Sarkar*, the money shall be made good to you. But if any one of your own people has cheated you, it rests with you yourselves to punish the guilty man and recover your dues from him. That will not be my business."

"Name the man of us whom you suspect, Lord *Sahib*," shouted some one from a back row.

"Who keeps your accounts and arranges your money affairs?" asked the Resident.

"Our good priest, Mullah Powindah," was the immediate response.

"You have named him," proclaimed the Resident in a loud voice.

This little incident caused a hubbub of excitement amongst the friends and enemies of the Mullah, and for some minutes the whole assembly was violently agitated. The disturbance was quelled by the Grand Old Man, Ibrahim Khan, again rising and shouting "Brothers! our Ameer *Sahib* spoke to us quite fairly, we can trust him, but whether we can our Mullah or not we can settle at home. We are here chiefly on a matter of law and justice, the release of our martyr."

This timely reminder turned the collective attention of the assembly into a new channel, and a dozen throats got hoarse shouting, "yes, yes, release our martyr."

Above these cries and the buzz of excited talk was now heard the voice of the Resident: "Without silence there can be no discussion. Cease making a row or I pack you off to your hills at once. I come here to talk with responsible elders, not with unmannerly boys."

Once more common sense prevailed, and those whose object it was to prevent a settlement had to keep quiet and watch a better moment for committing the reluctant to some act of defiance.

Silence restored, the Resident, addressing the Grand Old Man, said, "Do I understand you to assert that the *ghāzī* did not attempt to take my life?"

"We assert nothing, *Sahib*," replied Ibrahim Khan with dignity; "you had to prove the charge, and you failed. No one saw the boy strike at you, but a little Miss *Sahib*, and our *shara'* law decides that in a question of blood a woman's statement shall not be received as evidence."

"He struck at me then, you admit that?" queried the Resident, as persuasive as a clever barrister surprising an admission from a witness.

"Yes, yes, of course, he did," roared fifty voices at the same time.

"You hear that," said Colonel Fitzhugh to Ibrahim Khan sternly, "and you dare to come here and demand the release of a cowardly assassin."

The old man looked and felt ashamed, and was about to make some blundering reply, when a thin clear voice from a back row penetrated every ear in the assemblage.

"That is not the point," it said; "the question is not 'is the boy guilty'? but 'is his guilt legally proved?' Under *shara'* law it is not; under the law of the *Sahibs* it is not, because under their law only fools who confess and those who cannot pay heavy fees to pleaders are convicted; but our martyr did not confess, and there were no pleaders here to plunder him, hence under English law

he must be acquitted even if the *Sahibs* are so weak as to admit a woman's evidence."

"Bravo, the little Kāzī," cried several astute enough to understand the points.

Whilst the counsel for the Pechistanis had been developing his argument, Lorimer, who was closely observing his chief, saw the Resident's frown relax into an exultant smile. Noticing the boy's surprise and guessing the cause, Colonel Fitzhugh whispered to him good humouredly, "A smart rascal that, but he has given himself away, and won't have the laugh long."

Then he turned to one of the military officers beside him and said in a low voice, "There's going to be a lively scene presently I expect; will you oblige me by quietly collecting a few *Sepoys* and holding them handy. If you hear me shout 'the Queen' dash in from behind my chair. The tent *kanāts* (canvas walls) on this side have purposely been so erected that they will give way under slight pressure from without."

The officer slipped away without his departure being noticed.

The Pechistanis had by now ceased praising their "little Kāzī," and were impatiently awaiting the Resident's reply.

"Answer, *Sahib*, if you can. Be quick," cried some irresponsible youngster insolently.

"Let your Kāzī come before me face to face and hear me then," said Colonel Fitzhugh calmly.

The man rose, but did not advance with alacrity. Possibly he was a modest counsel, and did not

desire a prominent position. Some of his neighbours began to push him forwards, whilst a few held him back.

The Grand Old Man sat silent, hanging his head, dejected no doubt, that an obscure upstart had usurped all attention. The elders in the front rows looked anxious, but did not interfere. Their melancholy eyes were turned eagerly, almost imploringly, on their Ameer *Sahib*: would he forbear or force the situation was the question occupying their minds.

"Look sharp," urged the Resident, "your Kāzī seems a night-owl, heard not seen. My argument can only be spoken to his face."

Thus challenged, the man, expedited by sundry vigorous shoves, came forwards, but evidently his personal reluctance to stand before the dais was great. When at last he stood there in front of the group of British officers the Resident looked at him and muttered to himself, "I thought so," then raising his voice spoke to the assemblage at large.

"This man," he said, "is your late messenger, one Ghulam Ahmad, a murderer and convict, who escaped from the gaol here a year ago. I warned him, and I warned you that if you brought proclaimed outlaws with you, and they were recognized, I should arrest them; I shall consequently arrest this man. As to the other outlaws with you, if they keep quiet inside your *serais*, they will escape recognition."

As this speech was being delivered a great silence fell on the sitting crowd. Who would

make the next move? The Mullah Powindah had insisted that the "little Kāzī" should be one of the deputation on the plea that the Grand Old Man was a poor lawyer and apt to lose his head, but really with a view to force the moderates of the tribe into the ranks of the fighting extremists. The outlaw had come in against his will, as he knew what awaited him if he were recognized, and wished also to be free to settle his account with Fazl Ali if a chance offered. Having come in, the Mullah's friends and his own vanity had impelled him to speak.

The next move came from the Resident, who called forward the smart native police officer already mentioned, and ordered him to remove his prisoner. The police-officer deftly slipped handcuffs on the putative Kāzī's wrists and made a move towards marching him off.

At the instant such an insulting spectacle instantly changed the momentary indecision of the war party into action. Fifty men sprang up from different parts of the big tent; whilst some stood still and shouted, or brandished their daggers, others began to push through their still-seated brethren towards the officer and his prisoner. As they struggled forwards they kept yelling like maniacs. Some cried, "Let him go!" some, "Take off the handcuffs!" and some "Knife the sepoy!" meaning the police-officer.

Seeing the man's danger, young Lorimer and two of the military officers present sprang forwards to protect him and prevent the rescue of the pri-

somer. Just as the din was at its height, and happily before knives had been used, Colonel Fitzhugh shouted, "The Queen!" At the signal down fell the tent-wall and in rushed a handful of armed Sikh soldiers. They surrounded the plucky police-officer and those helping him, and with bayonets fixed faced the madmen who had been intent on effecting the Kāzī's rescue.

Their sudden appearance and action cowed the rioters, some of whom slunk back to their seats, whilst others stood still.

Before the excitement had subsided, the prisoner had been removed. The Resident then turned to the now sullen, scowling sea of faces in front of him, and announced his decision :—

"The young *Ghāzi*," he said, "has been treated leniently, and you know it. All this legal quibbling is the invention of your Mullah and the so-called Kāzī, Ghulam Ahmad, and you know it. Here, trans-Indus, we dispense justice, not technical law, as *cis-Indus*, and you know it. Both *Ghāzi* and Kāzī will complete their respective sentences. Have you anything further to urge?"

"Yes, *Sahib*," replied Ibrahim Khan resolutely, seizing the chance of recovering his eclipsed prestige; "it is our custom that every member of a *jirga* has a safe conduct. The Kāzī, whether sentenced murderer or not, is in asylum with our tribe; hence by arresting him you have defied us. I ask you to release him and let us depart in peace."

Opposing shouts of "yes" and "no" met this

firm yet conciliatory speech ; but Colonel Fitzhugh was unmoved.

" You were warned," he said, " and he was warned. Had he held his tongue, he would have escaped recognition. His loquacity proclaimed his presence here, and forced me to carry out my declared word. After all, he is only a mischief-maker amongst you. Enough."

" *Sahib*," deprecated the Grand Old Man solemnly, " you ignore the privilege of *jirgas*."

The term exactly suited the humour of the impulsive savages.

" Yes, privilege ! privilege !" was shouted from every part of the tent.

The Resident held up his hand, and the shouting ceased. " Is it peace or war ? " he asked.

" War ! war ! " was screamed from a hundred throats. But the majority, including the old men, remained silent, pondering over the untoward course which the discussion had taken, and well aware that war meant the destruction of their crops, hamlets, and towers, and wandering misery for their women, children, and old people.

" As you will ! " thundered the Resident in answer ; " but, to give you time to cool, you shall be the Sarkar's guests for another day, and a few of you can see me to-morrow if you wish."

With a wave of his hand as a sign of dismissal he rose and turned to go, but young Lorimer stayed him.

" Let me speak to their grey-beards, sir," he besought his chief. " I am sure they wish for peace."

"Try; but it's useless."

Lorimer went forward amongst the rows and spoke persuasively to those of the leading elders whom he recognised. He was popular and respected, as all knew him to be an earnest, upright English gentleman who had their good at heart. Presently he returned to the dais, on which the Resident was still standing, and with him came a score or so of elderly men. The rest of the assemblage remained seated, some talking in groups eagerly together, others in silent stupefaction, pondering over their own helplessness, conscious that Mullah Powindah—who had discreetly remained at home—had had his way, not they theirs.

"Well," said the Resident in conciliatory tones to the old men before him, "are you with the young fire-eaters in this folly?"

"We have no choice, *Sahib*," was the dejected reply; "we must go with our people in a question of tribal honour, or be treated as traitors. The right of asylum, and the privilege of *jirgas*, are so sacred with us that, if we made no protest, the neighbouring tribes would call us cowards and boycott us. We will do our best to end the trouble when honour has been satisfied, and our people have learnt that the Mullah's amulets are powerless against the Sarkar's bullets."

"I am sorry for you all," said the Resident, with a ring of regret in his voice. "Then I suppose it is mischief (*badi*)? I cannot call it war."

"We shall consult together, and reply when we go to our homes," was the diplomatic answer.

"A last word," said Colonel Fitzhugh. "Be men of honour, and don't let the reply take the shape of some act of black treachery. It would only make the punishment heavier."

So saying the Resident and his officers withdrew from the tent. Outside, each man's first act was to spit and then inflate his lungs with fresh air.

"Pheugh! it was poisonous in there," said young Tombs, the man who had first rushed to the rescue of the police-officer; "a football squash at school, near the end of the game, was nothing to it."

"It was better when the *kanāt* behind us was thrown down by the Sepoys," remarked Lorimer.

"I hardly noticed anything," said Colonel Fitzhugh; "I was intent on the proceedings; and besides, I am hardened to the smells of *jirgas*."

So ended the meeting. The Mullah and his Jingoes were triumphant, the moderates were committed: they could not honourably draw back, the cause was too good for that—good enough, certainly to unite the whole of upper Pechistan against the Sarkar and the Sarkar's soldiers, white and brown until hill honour had been satisfied, at least.

* * * *

Next morning the *jirgas* departed "with honour" and with food in abundance—as they carried off half their rations, including fifty-three fat-tailed sheep. By the afternoon the station, swept and garnished, had resumed the normal cleanly aspect of our Punjab cantonments.

Opinion was divided as to whether the hill-tribes would descend and fight, or sulk at home in their

mountain fastnesses. The Moharram was approaching ; if that period of Musalman excitement and fanaticism were tided over without an outbreak, the chances were—so the most experienced officers held—that the Resident's " lambs " would acquiesce in his hardly judicious treatment of their protected suppliant, the loquacious self-styled Kāzī, Ghulam Ahmad. They knew his presence was an embarrassment to them, but then hill Pathans are peculiarly sensitive upon points of honour, and if their neighbours should taunt them as cowards, the Pechistanis would be bound to prove themselves brave men.

On the whole the Resident and Brigadier thought it would be prudent to strengthen the garrisons of some of the outposts, and send out a small, thoroughly equipped force for purposes of observation to the Sherauna villages at the western end of the Mankiala valley. It was decided that this force should consist of 300 infantry, two mountain guns, and twelve sabres, and be commanded by Colonel Renny, an officer of long frontier service, and accompanied by a clever young civilian, Mr. Lee, a nephew of the Viceroy, an embryo political from Calcutta, sent by the Foreign Office, ostensibly to strengthen the Resident's staff, but more probably to qualify for a good billet, with possibly a general instruction to keep the Foreign Secretary confidentially informed about Colonel Fitzhugh's doings.

Rumours about that brilliant political's extravagance and high-handedness had for some time

been in circulation, and of late anonymous complaints, charging him, amongst other things, with the misappropriation of Government money, had been received by the Viceroy.

Young Lee's arrival annoyed the Resident. He wanted men, not schoolboys, about him, he said ; and secretariat boys were his special aversion—they were conceited scribblers, not workers ; they preferred an office chair, a good quill, and the picking to pieces of a hastily-written report to the saddle, a day on the hill-side, and an open-air talk with obstinate, odoriferous head - men. Acting upon this view, the Resident told young Lee that he would be sent as political assistant with Colonel Renny, under whom he would learn to walk before he should run.

To Colonel Fitzhugh's surprise, the boy was elated at getting what he called "his chance," and started with the little force, breeched, booted, armed, and as hopeful of distinction as a subaltern on his first campaign. After all, he was an Eton boy, good at games and fond of sport, and the airs and mannerisms engendered by a few months of spoiling in Calcutta were only surface deep.

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His defensive preparations having been made Colonel Fitzhugh reported fully on the situation to the Government of India, and recommended that arrangements should at once be begun for the rapid concentration of a punitive force at Mankiala, should the necessity for an expedition arise. He pointed out that the sole cause of delay in mobiliza-

tion was always the difficulty of obtaining transport, and he urged that 5,000 camels and 5,000 mules should be at once collected, and their owners reconciled to impressment by liberal pay, and the promise of free rations for man and beast from arrival at the base.

He warned Government that if the tribesmen meant mischief their declaration of war would not be a written ultimatum, but some sudden and bloody act of treachery, if a chance were given, or, if that failed, the sweeping up of the cattle of some exposed village, and the murder of as many peasants as was possible. The blow of the tribal combination delivered, the punishment should be swift and exemplary, sufficient to serve as a deterrent for the next twenty years. By timely preparation and rapid action, Government might accomplish, with few troops and an expenditure of ten lakhs, what would cost treble or quadruple that amount if delay and vacillation occurred once the enemy had shown their teeth. In his opinion the hill Pechistanis meant fighting, being hungry, idle, misled by interested intriguers, and under the impression that the Sarkar would rather concede their extravagant demands than incur the expense of attacking them in their own mountains, and run the risk of giving India's "good friend and ally," the Ameer of Afghanistan, an opportunity of showing that that term covers a malevolent neutrality almost amounting to hostility.

Having prepared for all eventualities to the best of his ability, Colonel Fitzhugh, after consultation

with Lorimer, decided that Fazl Ali must at once be forced to show himself in his true colours. Accordingly, a peremptory order was wired to him to Peshawer to rejoin his post within forty-eight hours. He would be less dangerous on nominal duty at Mankiala than on leave in the hills, where he would act as Mullah Powindah's secret adviser. If he obeyed the order, good ; if he disobeyed it, or could not be found, there would be corroboration of the truth of the story that he was with the aforesaid Mullah.

Chapter XIV

RIVALS

WHILST Colonel Fitzhugh was maturing the plans which he expected would result in a K.C.B. for himself and proportionate honours for many of his friends, his wife and her cousin, helped materially by Lorimer, had done much to rescue him from the consequences of his years of extravagance and blind confidence in Fazl Ali. By the sale of Mary's diamonds, supplemented by contributions from Dolly and Lorimer—who, like a sensible man, had already begun to save money—the whole deficit in the permanent advance had been quietly made good. The expenses of the household, too, had been largely reduced.

Thus, though he did not know it, George Fitzhugh was now living well within his income, and his accounts were in order, and would bear scrutiny. Thus too, though Fazl Ali did not know it, that scoundrel's careless master was almost a free man indebted somewhat to banks, it is true, but no longer liable to be convicted of misappropriating political funds.

The account difficulties settled, the ladies were

now occupied in matters personal to themselves. To say nothing of the little Alan's claims on their time, a guest, who has already been introduced, the Reverend Josiah Gubbins by name, required a great deal of attention, and even management.

Whether it was that Dolly had really made a lasting impression on his previously adamantine heart, or that her repulse of his advances had wounded his susceptibilities, he was now in poor health. On returning to his station after his late visit to Mankiala "a green and yellow melancholy" took possession of him. His friends soon began to notice with concern a falling off in his appetite and flesh, whilst his flock, who were chiefly soldiers, congratulated themselves on sermons of five minutes duration only.

As the chaplain grew thinner, so did his congregation,—at least, the voluntary portion of it,—and as a consequence his offertories fell off also. This last defection was an unpardonable sign of incompetence in the eyes of the good Bishop of Lahore ; so that high dignitary instituted enquiries, which resulted in the Reverend Josiah Gubbins being ordered to seek rest and change of air for a month. Naturally, he sought to recuperate at Mankiala, and naturally, also, the gentle Mary offered him a bed in the still hospitable Residency.

He was thus an interesting object, or rather an object of interest, to both ladies. Dolly pitied, whilst despising him, knowing that she was the cause of his falling away from the ways of grace—as evidenced by the collections. Mary pitied him

because of Dolly's hardness of heart, owing to which he looked so delicate.

At that critical period in frontier affairs young Lorimer was a constant visitor at the Residency. Every morning he had business with his chief, and every day about noon gravitated under the laws of natural attraction from the office to wherever the ladies were. His habitual reserve made it impossible for either lady to say positively which of them was the magnet. As each had her special views on the subject, all logically demonstrable from facts, which the other would not accept, the myth was started, and soon accepted by both as an article of faith, that it was the baby he came to see.

"The dear boy is so fond of babies, you see," explained Dolly mischievously to the jealous Mr. Gubbins.

"Then why does he not marry?" blurted out the reverend blunderer.

"I dare say he may," responded Dolly demurely.

Mr. Gubbins looked unhappy at this announcement, and subsided into a low chair and gloomy thoughts. The words, "It is time for your beef-tea," roused him from his reveries, and looking up he beheld Dolly with a tray in her hands standing in front of him.

He sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "How good you are to me in deed, how cruel in word!"

"Deeds, not words, are my motto," said the pretty waiting-maid. "Come, drink it up."

Thus encouraged, Mr. Gubbins drank his beef-

tea, and, nothing loth, resumed the rôle of interesting invalid.

Dolly, who for the last few days had been on her best behaviour, resigned herself to be bored ; but her martyrdom did not last long. The invalid was now reclining on a couch, and Dolly, seated close to him, was, at his request, reading aloud—preferring that penance to talking—when in walked young Lorimer. There was no love lost between the two men. To the political the priest was a conceited, presuming milksop. To the priest the political was a pushing, offensive young prig, and possibly favoured rival.

Dolly naturally ceased reading when Lorimer entered, and truthfully, but imprudently, remarked how glad she was to see him, as she wanted to ask a dozen questions about the impending campaign.

"Campaign !" echoed Mr. Gubbins ; " I had not heard of it. *The Times* says there is not a cloud on the horizon."

" Miss Carew means the possible expedition against the hill-men here," explained Lorimer severely.

" That would hardly be a campaign—hill-picnics I have heard such excursions called," said Mr. Gubbins disparagingly ; and he supplemented his verdict by adding, " Besides, no one believes it will come off."

" If it does, a chaplain will be wanted for the British troops ; so I suppose you will volunteer your services ? " remarked Lorimer.

"I—why should I?"

"Because you are young, on the spot, and fond of picnics," said Lorimer

"I could not go, being on the sick list," objected Mr. Gubbins.

"He is very nearly well," broke in Dolly, not unwilling to enliven the conversation.

"I am glad of that," said Lorimer to Dolly, in a necessarily audible aside; "your time is too precious to be wasted any longer in reading to a convalescent."

"So I am causing Miss Carew to waste her precious time, am I?" inquired Mr. Gubbins, in a pugnacious tone.

"Miss Carew has many duties," returned Lorimer oracularly; "and now that you are better I dare say you will be glad to see some rough service in the hills."

"I am not a medal hunter, Mr. Lorimer," said the priest, by way of rebuke.

"I thought not. I suppose you would prefer to remain here and take care of the ladies whilst we are away? That is more your rôle."

"I shall be pleased to be entrusted with their protection," Mr. Gubbins admitted. "Such a duty would more become my cloth than having to witness the shooting down of badly armed savages."

"Your cloth, as you call it, often covers a multitude of failings—a faint heart, for instance, included," sneered Lorimer.

The hardly deserved taunt enraged the invalid; his face flushed, he sprang from the couch, and

was about to make some angry retort, when, remembering Dolly's presence, he stood irresolute.

Dolly, innocent cause of all this bickering, looked at the two men in surprise. To quarrel in her presence was an offence against her womanhood ; to quarrel about her behind her back would have been a tribute to her fascinations.

"Mr. Lorimer," she said with dignity, "you must apologize this instant. The innuendo was unjustifiable and insulting."

He made an awkward *amende*, but Mr. Gubbins, ignoring the proffered hand, threw a deprecating look upon his goddess and moved to the door. As he left the room he whispered in the ear of the divinity : "I had better go ; I might lose my temper, you know, and hurt him if I remained."

The moment he had gone Dolly gave her young friend a good scolding, and told him he was more to blame than any of the hill-men, who had picked the quarrel with her cousin.

"I have no excuse," Lorimer admitted contritely. "Mr. Gubbins' position on the couch and invalid airs annoyed me. I have never lost my self-control before."

"Well, don't lose it again, please," returned Dolly, not unkindly, satisfied with his humble submission ; "that is," she went on to explain, "if you wish to retain my friendship."

"Friendship!" he echoed bitterly ; "is that all?"

"What can you mean, Mr. Lorimer?"

"I don't want friendship—it's your love I want.

I have concealed my feelings so long, but I can't any longer. Oh, Dolly! won't you care for me a little? We shall be separated so soon now."

All this rushed in a torrent from the distraught young man's lips, and every sentence was a stab for Dolly. For, after all, she had flirted with him —just a little; but had never expected that this precise, self-contained, spectacled civilian would lose his head over her. At heart she was George's still, though she kept him at a distance; and how poorly this youth showed compared with the masterful ways of her cousin!

"Will you not say something to me?" pleaded the boy, as Dolly remained silent.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Lorimer. I had no idea you were fond of me," she began, in the usual way when a girl lets a foolish admirer down. "I am sure I never gave you encouragement, did I?"

"No, certainly not; you were only friendly with me sometimes," he generously acknowledged; and he believed it was true, so ignorant was the poor boy of woman's little ways.

"I always thought it was Mary you admired—at a distance, I mean," she remarked, in a demurely tentative manner.

"Mrs. Fitzhugh?" he exclaimed reverently; "but she is a married woman."

Dolly laughed at the innocence of his differentiation, and assured him marriage was no bar to admiration.

He listened gravely, and explained, "Mrs. Fitzhugh is my ideal of a perfect woman."

"And I of an imperfect one, I suppose?" suggested Dolly naively.

"You—you," he replied slowly, seeking to discriminate between the feelings with which each inspired him, and failing completely; "why, you are altogether lovable. Your touch alone thrills me; your voice makes my heart beat faster; but of Mrs. Fitzhugh I have never thought, except to be thankful such a woman exists to raise one's whole belief in human nature."

"I see," said Dolly, pretending to be offended; "I am common clay, and she delicate china. I am merely an ordinary woman, and she is a Madonna."

"No, no, you mistake me; at least, you are—"

"Have you ever been in love before, Mr. Lorimer?" asked Dolly coolly, saving him from more blundering protestations.

"Never," he answered conscientiously; "at least it never kept me awake at night before."

"I am sorry I do that," she said meditatively; and then added quickly, holding out her hand, "Let us remain friends as before, that's all. I like you, Mr. Lorimer, very much; but I am in love, as you call it, with some one else already."

"Not with Mr. Gubbins?" he queried, taking alarm.

"You silly boy! of course not. I prefer a man. There now, go away. I hear Colonel Fitzhugh calling for you";—and he went, wondering how he could have been so foolish, and thinking that Dolly had treated him very kindly, considering his presumption.

That young person had not yet ended her morning's experiences of the by-ways of the masculine heart, for a few minutes afterwards the Reverend Josiah Gubbins furtively opened the door, put his head in, and peered round the room. Seeing that the object of his search was still there, and alone, he entered, carefully shutting the door behind him.

"I thought you had gone to lie down, Mr Gubbins," said Dolly to him, a suspicion of vexation in her voice.

"I did lie down, but I could not rest," he sighed, with a deprecating glance at the disturbing cause.

"What! another case of insomnia, and all my fault," thought Dolly; and then she said aloud to the sufferer, "Shall I ask Doctor Atherby-Jones to give you a sedative?"

"It is unnecessary," he explained, shaking his head lugubriously and assuming an insinuating smile. "I was restless, as *he* was here alone with you, so I got up and watched the passage until he left. I saw that his face was gloomy, and it made me happy."

"You don't look it," said Dolly bluntly, feeling awfully bored.

"How can I be well or happy so long as your hand withholds the only medicine which will cure my malady?"

"Medicine? Malady? What can you mean?"

"You know what I mean quite well," he replied, with the testiness of the privileged invalid.

"Well, the medicine you want I cannot give."

"What? You have parted with it—not, surely,

to him—a mere boy in spectacles?" demanded the Rev. Josiah, in a tremor of nervous jealousy.

Dolly had difficulty in restraining her laughter, the family resemblance between her two suddenly declared admirers being so grotesquely close.

"To no boy, Mr. Gubbins," she answered with grand condescension.

The assurance relieved the over-wrought priest, who so far forgot his cloth as to murmur audibly, "Thank God for that!"

"Now, Mr. Gubbins," here announced Dolly, with the superior knowledge of the family physician, combined with the sweet persuasiveness of a pretty woman, "I prescribe rest in your own room till dinner-time. It will allay the nervous prostration from which you are suffering;" and, as she had done with young Lorimer, she shook hands with him, comforting him with the promise that their former relations as friends would continue undisturbed.

He obeyed in meek dejection.

Like Lorimer, he recognised that he had been very unwise, and that the queen of his heart—if he really had a heart, which is doubtful—had been very good to him. After all, as the favoured one was not the boy in spectacles, he could bear his disappointment.

When he had gone, Dolly, unruffled by her morning's exercises, sat down to think it all out.

"I fear I am a little naughty," she thought; "in fact, I know it. I don't want to lead young men on, but I suppose I must do so. I have some of

the faults of my sex, I dare say ; but it is hard that I cannot be friendly with any man for a few days even without his losing his head over me. Heigho ! if Jack had not been so exacting, I should never have been miserable ; and if I had not been miserable, I should never even have been tempted. Quite so ; but then I should never have met George, never have saved his life, and never have been initiated into the art of—of—cataloguing."

* * * *

That night many faces peeped at Dolly in her dreams, and though George's was the nearest to her, and her arms went out to twine themselves round his neck, it was Jack whom she unwillingly embraced, and he whispered to her that it was all a mistake, they had both been tempted of Satan, and gone a little astray, but their trials were over : they would never part again. Such an unsought consummation caused her to awake.

Then she slept again, in dreamless slumber this time, but at her usual hour of waking she heard bells—wedding bells surely ? Why, she was standing at the altar, plighting herself for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer ; but whom was she marrying ? She could not see the face ; he had turned it away from her. "Forsaken at the altar !" How strange, she thought. No, he turns towards her. Why, it's Jack Hargraves, and the sight of him gave her no pleasure.

Just then the marriage bells rang out in clear and merry peals.

She awoke with a start, and was brought back to life's dull realities by hearing the mournful single-knock, dang—dang—dang, of the station church gong. A coolie was summoning the Christians of Mankiala to early service by striking with a wooden mallet a piece of old rail, which hung from a tree, and did duty as the church bell.

Dolly jumped out of bed and dressed in a hurry, remembering it was Sunday, and that she had promised to go to 8 o'clock communion service with Mary.

Chapter XV

HIGH POLITICS AND HAPLESS LOVE

THE Government took some time to reply to Colonel Fitzhugh's representations, and when the orders did come, they were, as is usual in such cases, unsatisfactory to the man of action on the spot.

As regards the proceedings at the *jirga* meeting, the Foreign Secretary pointed out that from the large preponderance of young men in the assemblage it was evident that the *personnel* was not representative of the matured wisdom of the tribes and sections concerned. A *jirga*, as defined in the Political Dictionary of the North-Western Frontier —a standard work compiled at Government headquarters, and therefore of unimpeachable authority —was a Council of Elders or grey-beards. It was observed with regret by His Excellency the Viceroy in Council that of the three hundred "persons" who interviewed Colonel Fitzhugh, only thirty or forty had grey or white beards ; hence it was inaccurate to describe an assemblage in which only 10 or 12 per cent. of its members were men over fifty years of age as "a Council of Elders."

Having noticed this preliminary objection against the constitutionally representative character of the men who had interviewed the Resident, the Government proceeded to discuss the events of the meeting itself.

The question for deliberation was whether or not a certain youth, described in the proceedings as one Allayar Khan, a "*ghāzī*," had been rightly or wrongly convicted and sentenced. The action of the tribes in bringing forward that question was equivalent to what is termed, in civil law, an application for a review of judgment. The question raised was therefore perfectly regular and constitutional, and it was the duty of the Resident to have delivered a formal judgment on the point. This he had unfortunately not done; he had merely declared in one short sentence that the accused had been justly found guilty and convicted. The Resident had not attempted to thresh out the point of law involved. That was a material error in his proceedings, as in all dealings with trans-frontier tribes it was a matter of first importance to instil into their minds a respect for law.

The next subject to which the Government of India took exception was that the court—for practically the Resident was sitting as a court—had diverged from the issue under trial into a totally irrelevant matter; the court had suddenly ordered the arrest of the counsel for the defence, one Kāzī Ghulām Ahmad; had thereby brought about an unseemly disturbance, in which armed Sepoys, instead of civil police constables, had

been employed, and had finally removed the said counsel to jail. This high-handed proceeding had not unreasonably offended the sense of the *jirga*. It was true that the said counsel was a convicted murderer and proclaimed outlaw, who had escaped from the Government jail ; but even so, it was a question, on which the Government reserved their decision, as to whether the man was or was not at the time, according to international law, in asylum, and, if so, exempt from arrest whilst under the protection of the tribe.

On this point, as well as on that of the legality of the conviction of the so-called *ghāzī*, the Government were consulting their legal advisers, and might perhaps find it necessary to have both subjects argued *ex hypothesi* before the learned judges of the High Court of Calcutta.

In conclusion, after a careful consideration of all the circumstances of the case, the Government of India, as at the time advised, were unable to confirm the Resident's decision, and desired him to communicate their views to the tribes or sections concerned, and to suggest to them that if they would send down to Mankiala a constitutionally representative deputation of Elders, not more than fifteen in number, the Government advocate would be instructed to meet them, and the points in doubt would be argued out.

There was, His Excellency in Council observed, little that was satisfactory in these proceedings with the exception of one point, and that was that the hitherto wild and lawless tribes of Pechistan

were exhibiting a disposition to refer disputes to the arbitrament of the law, rather than of brute force—a disposition worthy of encouragement, as evidencing the progress and enlightenment of a hitherto barbarous and backward people.

In a later communication, in reply to the reports and representations of the Resident on the defensive measures which he had adopted, and the offensive preparations which he had advocated, the Government of India informed him that the consideration of these subjects would be deferred, pending his reply to their lengthy despatch upon his *jirga* proceedings.

At the same time the Resident was cautioned to be careful in moving troops in the valley or strengthening the outposts, lest the susceptibilities of the Pechistan highlanders should be hurt, and their readiness to appeal to law rather than force receive a check. As to collecting transport and taking steps for the immediate mobilization of a small field-force, the Government pointed out that such measures would be wastefully costly and in every sense premature, until the outbreak of hostilities should make the sacrifices involved necessary. There could be no doubt that the Resident's distrust of these tribes and anticipations of treachery were unfounded, because their remarkable readiness and aptitude in discussing legal subtleties, and their appreciation of the arguments of their counsel, indicated an adhesion to the comity of nations which the Government were confident would not be lightly surrendered.

Colonel Fitzhugh treated these weighty State-documents with the respect which was their due.

He called his assistant, Lorimer, into his office, and let that clear-headed young political read them. He then endorsed on each, "To be considered a week hence, after the Moharram," and initialled and dated the endorsements. Having done so, he locked the documents up in his confidential box, and turning to the curious observer beside him, remarked enigmatically,—

"It's the man in the moon instructing the man in the room."

"I don't quite follow you, sir," said Lorimer, who preferred straight speech to metaphor.

"I mean some clerk in Calcutta thinks he understands these hill savages better than I, on the spot, do."

"But why do you not begin to carry out your instructions, sir?"

"Because there is no time. The tribes will act before I can reply. The Moharram began on Tuesday, and this is Sunday. Mullah Powindah and his friends will work their dupes up into committing some outrage before the week is out, and then *solvitur ambulando*."

"Still you might wire something in case—ahem—the inevitable does not happen this time," suggested Lorimer, whose sense of discipline was shocked.

"So I did; I wired, 'Expect reply within seven days.' The reply will be the outrage; and then I

shall receive a telegram cancelling both despatches as issued under a misconception."

"Will that end it, sir?"

"No; I shall shortly after receive a friendly and confidential letter, explaining that neither Viceroy nor Foreign Secretary had seen either despatch, otherwise the form would have been different."

"Very good, sir," said Lorimer, with a serious smile; "I'll make a note of your prophecy. But do such mistakes often happen?"

"Occasionally only. When an office is very busy its Head cannot read every draft; then, in all great departments of State, a junior secretary has sometimes to be used as a scape-goat. The Government of India, like the king, 'can do no wrong,' nor write it; hence, whether fact or fiction, a scape-goat is a necessity."

"How do you suppose, sir, these lawyers' letters—for they are that and nothing more—came to be written and issued?" asked Lorimer.

"Probably some clever junior assistant of a judicial turn of mind noted points on my reports, and in the hurry of business the Foreign Secretary, or His Excellency the Viceroy, must have initialled and 'approved' the wrong note."

Lorimer listened, and pondered, and perceived the reasonableness of the Resident's defence of the Government of India.

The despatch locked away, Colonel Fitzhugh went to lunch, and found his old friend, General Sir Atwell Pottinger, seated at the table. He had arrived that morning, having sniffed the scent

of possible active service from his distant headquarters of Sultanabad. He had come down to be on the spot, and make sure that, within his command at least, there should be no delay, should the order to mobilize come. He was in war-paint, as an inspection parade of the garrison had been ordered for 3.30 p.m.

"Ah! Fitzhugh, how are you?" he said, as the Resident entered the room, but without waiting for a reply he went on—"And those militia-men—I was right, eh?"

"Yes, it was even worse than you suspected," was the gloomy answer.

"Of course, I knew it, but meant to let you down by degrees; no use shocking you too overwhelmingly. I'm never wrong with natives—I read them through like a book, eh?"

"Then your reading is very superficial," put in Dolly saucily, aware that the old warrior was her slave.

"How so, Miss Carew?"

"Because you told me you read a novel in no time. These were your very words. I suppose you skip immensely?"

"I skip no part of you, Miss Carew—I know you, at least, by heart," he said, with bold directness, surveying her.

"There's so little of me, perhaps, I'm not worth skipping," she suggested, laughing.

"You're every bit of you precious, eh?" he rejoined, glowing on her with his staring, admiring eyes.

"Come, Sir Atwell, have you no compliments left for me?" asked Mrs. Fitzhugh, wishing to end their badinage.

"Well, I was only waiting to tell your husband—in confidence, of course, after lunch—that I hardly recognised you when I came in," he said, rather clumsily.

"I can't have aged so much in two months, surely?" exclaimed Mary, a little disappointed.

"Aged! Bless me, no—you are five years younger," he cried. "You look to me a happy woman now, whereas at my last visit, to tell you the truth, I did not think you were long for this world; you were so—so—ethereal—eh?"

"I am happier," Mary admitted, with an air of judicial impartiality. "I have unlearnt some things, and learnt others, haven't I, George?"

"I can't say, dear," he laughed; "you have never confessed nor confided in me. But I know you are four pounds heavier than you were, and you read novels now, and go about more."

"I suppose he means all that as a compliment, Mrs. Fitzhugh," Sir Atwell remarked. "Really, when a husband begins discussing his wife's weight in public it's time for wise bachelors to retire—eh?"

"It's past three," cut in Dolly; "and I have to get my habit on yet."

The General took the hint, and the luncheon party broke up, but soon after re-assembled outside the Residency, equipped for riding.

Sir Atwell invited Dolly to come with him, vowing that the troops would march past better if

she shared their salutes than were he at the flag-staff alone.

"I'm afraid I shall be a disturbing element," said Dolly self-confidently. She was aware that she never looked better than when well mounted, and George had lent her his first charger.

"Naturally," Sir Atwell acquiesced; "but a distraction is sometimes cheering even on parade. To-day when it's 'eyes front,' it will be a case of 'eyes right' to see you better; and that will vary the monotony of the show—eh?"

Dolly laughed, and she and the General started first, the aide-de-camp coming next, with the Rev. Josiah Gubbins on a safe old pony—a pensioner. Last of all came the Resident and his wife.

The whole party were soon grouped about the flag-staff, Dolly with the General in front, the others a little behind. On parade were a battery of Field Artillery, a wing of the Rifle Brigade, their best friends and admirers, the first battalion of the 5th Gurkhas, the 3rd Sikhs, shorn of 300 of their men, the 4th Punjab Native Infantry, and two squadrons of the 1st Punjab Cavalry—in all, about 2,500 troops, a compact little brigade. They went past quick-march and at the double, and then returned to their original formation, an extended line two deep.

"Is that all they are going to do?" asked Dolly, disappointed. "I thought they would gallop or skirmish past us, at least."

"Infantry don't gallop," laughed Sir Atwell.

"But surely they can fire off their rifles—Jack running for mustard, you know," she suggested.

"A *feu de joie*, you mean; but it's not Proclamation Day or the Queen's birthday," he objected.

"But it's *my* birthday, sir," said Dolly decisively, as if that fact were of much greater importance to the Empire.

"It is more than my commission is worth," Sir Atwell explained sorrowfully; "besides, the troops have no cartridges. However, I have not had my salute yet, and possibly the guns can be fired."

"How many?" asked the wayward girl.

"Nine."

"Well, fire them," she ordered.

The General looked at her and his heart was wholly conquered. He surrendered. Her figure was perfect; her habit made by Busvine; her charger George's favourite Arab; her face the embodiment of health and beauty, and her eyes magnetic enough to draw a sigh from an octogenarian, much more from the burly, susceptible veteran of only sixty-one; and then her low sweet voice and the imperious emphasis of the order to fire the guns. That was the last straw. What could any man have done but yield unconditionally, as General Pottinger did?

He turned to his aide-de-camp and gave his orders, and away that young officer galloped to carry them out, after casting a glance of admiring wonderment at Dolly.

Mary, from her position a little behind Dolly, had been an amused observer of Dolly's proceed-

ings. Whilst the performance was in progress she remarked to George that Dolly was, as usual, having a good time.

"She deserves it, I'm sure," her husband declared magnanimously.

"Certainly," agreed Mary in a hurry; "but don't you think it's a little hard on the dear old General to have his head turned at his age?"

"He likes it," said George; "besides, he thinks he has made the conquest—not she."

Just at that moment certain movements in the Field Battery attracted Mr. Gubbins' attention, and he remarked in nervous accents, "I think, Colonel Fitzhugh, the guns are going to open, and we are directly in front of them too."

"Oh, it's all right," said George airily; "the little mare was accustomed to firing twelve years ago, and ought to be steadier now, from age and experience. Besides, they are only firing blank, you know."

"Yes, but I've read of ramrods and even case-shot being discharged by mistake," he explained, with increasing uneasiness.

He had hardly finished speaking when the salute was fired.

"Thank you," said Dolly to her General, with sparkling eyes, "that was fun—but oh! oh! something's happened!"

And a good deal had happened. Two infantry field officers were on the ground, their chargers careering about in front of the long line of troops, tails erect, manes flowing, and nostrils snorting. Their excitement and free movements made them

look like veritable war-horses, whilst their late riders, in full review-panoply, picking themselves up from the ground, dazed, dusty, and rubbing their sore places, cut a very sorry appearance.

But another figure distracted all attention, for there, between flag-staff and the motionless yet grinning soldiery—with eyes front, left, or right, according to point of attraction—there was the Rev. Josiah Gubbins, his feet out of the stirrups, his trouser-ends half up his calves, his white cotton socks showing, his hat off, his arms clasped round his pony's neck, clinging to his Rosinante, as she cantered up and down in mild surprise at her freedom, and in milder fright—she was too experienced to be more than startled.

"He looks better in the pulpit than on horseback," remarked the General to Dolly, pointing to the keinoscopic priest and steed.

"He rides better than some of your mounted officers, for he sticks on," replied Dolly, waving her whip at the two unhorsed majors.

"It's all your doing, Miss Carew," said Sir Atwell, laughing heartily.

"Why?" she asked innocently. "I thought mounted officers could ride."

"Yes, but they did not expect any firing to-day. When they do they take the jumps out of their chargers by stopping or reducing their corn for a few days beforehand."

Dolly nodded, but continued to watch Mr. Gubbins, commiserating his situation.

" You understand, my dear—eh ? " continued the old General softly, wishing her to regard him, not the priest.

The tone and the "my dear" caused Dolly to do as he sought ; there was no mistaking his expression.

" Another of them," she thought. " What foolish creatures men are ! and they are all of the same pattern too."

" I think we had better go home," she said, and she moved to join her cousins.

But the General would not permit her to desert him, and insisted that as he had escorted her there, he must see her back to the Residency. They turned their horses' heads homewards, and did not get back for half an hour or more, though the distance was under a mile—so engrossing must have been the conversation between them.

As they approached, George noticed with amusement that Sir Atwell was silent and Dolly pensive. He advanced to help her down. Whilst lingeringly taking off her elastic from over the heel of her boot, he gazed up into her face and inquired in mock reproach, " Another victim, naughty child ? "

Dolly did not speak, and even ignored his offered hand. She jumped down, and going to her General, who had remained in his saddle looking set and stern, as if he were having his photograph taken, said in a low voice, which he alone heard, " You have been very good to me, and I don't deserve it."

He roused himself at the words; his throat worked curiously; he took her extended hand in his, and bending down to her whispered hoarsely, "I was an old fool. God bless you, dear!" and then he rode slowly away, omitting to say good-night to Mrs. Fitzhugh. At the same time Dolly disappeared into the house, evidently wishing to avoid conversation.

"Is he coming to dinner?" Mary inquired of her husband.

"No, dear; I did not ask him. The fact is—well—he has had bad news, I expect, and wants to write letters or something."

"Bad news? Why, Dolly has monopolized him all the afternoon, and he was in good spirits at lunch."

"Well, dear, ask Dolly; but I don't think she will enlighten you," said George, not surprised at his wife's unsuspicious obtuseness, for he knew she thought the girl a flirt, but did not understand her powers of fascination.

Mary sought for her cousin all over the house—even in her husband's office-room—but did not find her till she went to Dolly's bedroom.

The door was locked, admission was refused, and the sound from inside suspiciously resembled sobbing.

Chapter XVI

DRIVEN TO BAY

THAT same evening Sir Atwell sent over a note to Colonel Fitzhugh asking for an appointment, which was, of course, accorded. The Colonel, who supposed that Dolly would be the only object of discussion, playfully warned that young person to keep out of the way whilst her General would be closeted with him next morning.

"He is not my General," she protested; "but he is a dear, kind old man, and I intend to see him before he leaves."

"Will that be wise, as you know I can give him no encouragement?" he asked, taking the girl's hand in his, as if he had been her father.

Dolly flushed, drew the hand away, and answered gently, "We are at cross purposes, George dear, for it's your affairs, not mine, he wishes to talk over."

"How do you know?"

"He told me so himself."

George was mystified, annoyed. Dolly and Lorimer, his wife even, he believed, had for some time been holding conferences together, about

which they told him nothing. When he asked his wife or cousin what it was all about, or why one or other was looking so serious, the reply had been that as he was preoccupied with border politics they would not trouble him about domestic trivialities. On one occasion he remembered he had questioned Mary why she never wore any of her diamonds now, and she had answered evasively that until the present troubles were over she did not care to appear gay and festive. Then, only the preceding week, he had pressed Dolly for his accounts, and she had put him off with some paltry excuse about want of time. During the last few days both ladies had appeared to throw off anxiety and had joined heartily in station frivolities. Next appears on the scene his old friend, Sir Atwell Pottinger, and he monopolizes Dolly for hours, at the end of which both wear long faces. Apparently he must have been the subject of their conversation, and his supposition that Dolly had hurt her elderly admirer's vanity by declining an offer was all wrong; and, if so, why was the old boy coming to prose and make heavy jokes with him?

Thus, when General Pottinger was announced that morning, Colonel Fitzhugh was in a very bad humour. The visitor appeared the same, but it was more soreness of heart than vexation of mind which had for the time eclipsed his usual self-assertive joviality.

The two friends shook hands, Colonel Fitzhugh without cordiality, the General as a hangman might before pinioning his subject.

"I suppose you know," Sir Atwell said, plunging *in medias res* with blundering precipitancy, "that some clever scoundrel here has been making complaints against you to the Viceroy?"

"I never heard of it, and if I had, should have disregarded such stuff. Things of real importance occupy me just now," the Resident replied, with an air of bored indifference.

"But surely your honour, your reputation for integrity, is a matter of importance with you—eh?"

"Yes, if openly assailed. If His Excellency regards anonymous slander, it is he, not I, whose honour and reputation suffer."

"Are you aware that in remote stations Government maintain confidential agents—paid informers, in fact—who report everything of supposed public interest, and are little better than spies upon men like yourself?"

"I certainly was not," replied the Resident scornfully. "Government would not play it so low as that, and if I caught such a creature, by G—! I'd have him flogged, even were he protected by the Indian and Home Governments combined!"

"It's a fact, nevertheless," returned the General drily.

"Go on," urged his listener, grinding his teeth with rage; "you interest me. There's some infernal intrigue in progress around me, I know, and perhaps you can let in light upon it."

"Well, I was down at Calcutta lately, and—I

won't mention names—I was unofficially shown a collection of confidential reports about you, all received in the last month, in which you were charged in the most circumstantial way, details being given, with falsifying your political accounts, and misappropriating Government money. You have a political permanent advance of many thousands of rupees, have you not?"

"Yes, Rs15,000 or 20,000, I believe."

"Just so. The informer charges you with borrowing from that fund to meet your private expenditure. He maintains that you live beyond your means, and he says he believes, if the militia accounts are examined, it will be found that Government pays for two hundred men in buckram."

The General had taken notes about some of the details, and these he proceeded to read and dilate on.

As point after point was deployed, Colonel Fitzhugh felt his heart contract. It all sounded so like truth, and might be truth—on paper at least—if Fazl Ali were as deep a scoundrel as he now appeared to be.

The baited man sat there in his office chair motionless as one of his Buddhas, but he absorbed every sentence, every word. As he listened, his face purpled, his expression grew evil, the veins stood out on his forehead, his fingers twitched, and when his friend had finished reading his last note and looked up, Colonel Fitzhugh banged his fist on the table and said hoarsely,—

"It's all a d----d lie! Do you, do they, does any one believe a word of it?"

"Keep cool, old fellow," said Sir Atwell, with kindly intent. "The whole world knows you have been extravagant and careless, and your friends know you are a poor hand at accounts; in fact, they think you can't add two and two together, or at least won't take the trouble to do so, and that's all."

"Thank you and them for that small mercy," said the Resident sarcastically, very much hurt at such a candid *exposé* of his known incapacity for accounts.

"But the thing is to disprove these accusations. Can you do so?"

"I suppose so, when I've time," Colonel Fitz-hugh answered wearily, rubbing his open hand over his brow and eyes, as if he thought thereby to make his perceptions clearer.

"That was the reason I was shown the papers. They knew I was your friend, and they want to give you time to prepare your exculpation in case it should be necessary to institute a formal inquiry."

"But the charges are anonymous, you say; so how can such a necessity arise?" demanded the Resident.

"I don't think they can be regarded as exactly anonymous," explained Sir Atwell, ponderously deliberate. "I was not told in so many words, but gathered that the informer was the paid Government man. Whoever he is, he is a good

English scholar, and as clever as they are made."

"But no Government could act on such information ; as once this dirty system is exposed, public opinion would not stand it."¹

"True in a sense," admitted the General ; "but if the paid informer has any personal animus against you, as he must have, and Government takes no notice of his communications, which is unlikely, he can easily force an inquiry by inserting an anonymous letter or article in one of the native papers hostile to Government generally, and particularly spiteful against English officers with large salaries. It is done every day."

"Do you suspect who the informer is ?" asked Colonel Fitzhugh.

"I know who he must be. I never make a mistake about natives—eh ?"

"It must be Fazl Ali," exclaimed the Resident, the illumination of certainty on his face.

"Of course, Mr. Yellow-Face ; who else—eh ? And to think you are twenty years in the country and have the gift of tongues, whereas I am a mere soldier," chuckled the General.

"I don't see your point," said the Resident testily, offended at Sir Atwell's manner.

"My point—eh ? You've been an unsuspicious, trusting idiot, my friend, not to read through this clever, greedy Munshi of yours long ago. I bottomed him in a minute—eh ?" roared the General.

¹ See Appendix, Note 4.

" You are right, though you are not very polite over it," Colonel Fitzhugh admitted gloomily.

" Well, my friend," said Sir Atwell, getting up to go, " I've put you on your guard; and if a woman's wit—I mean Miss Carew's, for I've a devilish poor opinion of yours—can't put you right, nothing will."

" Was it of this you and she were talking on the way home last evening? " asked Colonel Fitzhugh suspiciously.

" Of this and—well, other things," Sir Atwell admitted with hesitation, his rubicund face growing even redder than its wont.

" Other things," repeated Colonel Fitzhugh mechanically, his mind fixed on the " this."

" Yes, yes; you were only a later incident—eh? " said the General hurriedly.

Colonel Fitzhugh sprang up, his eyes gleaming with excitement, his look almost that of a revengeful maniac. He thrust his hands home in his trouser pockets, and strode about the room, talking to himself and ignoring the kindly, bluff old General, who involuntarily made his bulky person as small as he could, and backed to a corner. Suddenly taking note of him, the worried man said warmly, " I thank you; it was kindly meant. I'll circumvent that devil yet. Now go, please; and remember, not a hint to my wife! "

So saying, he almost pushed his old friend out of the room.

Left alone, Colonel Fitzhugh locked the door and resumed his strides and cogitations.

"The treacherous hound," he muttered, "wired from Peshawer in reply to my order that he was returning at once; he may be here at any time now. I'll be even with him; I'll make him confess the whole dirty plot, and if he does not I'll throttle him. But Mary must know nothing; the very knowledge that I was in a mess like this, with all these frontier troubles on my hands too, would kill her. To be suspected by Mary, my own wife—it would be too horrible. Oh, let me not go mad, let me speak and move as if this weight were not on me"—and he pressed a hand against his hot temples, and tried to think out things clearly, but could not.

"Yes, who is there?" he called irritably, as he heard some one trying the handle of the door.

"It's I—Dolly. Don't you want me, George?" came the low, coaxing application for admission.

His nervous tension relaxed, he looked wildly round the room—papers disordered, chairs pushed away anyhow to leave him space to move, and he thought it was no place for her. She knew him as a calm, masterful man; were she to see him now, she might think him mad—mad—him, the Resident, the Ameer *Sahib*, the ruler of Pechistan.

With the cunning of a lunatic conscious of his derangement he noisily shuffled about some of his papers, and then replied softly to her, "No, dear, thank you, not just now, I am—busy—writing."

"You are all right, George, are you not?" again came the sympathetic, doubting voice.

"Yes, Dolly, never better," he returned, trying to give the words the ring of sincerity.

"You will call me if you want me, won't you?" again came the voice.

"I always want you, Dolly; but you never want me now," was the answer, his mind, diverted for the moment, going back to the determined way in which she now avoided him.

Dolly went away almost satisfied that nothing unusual was happening.

The interruption had calmed him somewhat, but he felt low and required a stimulant. He found his keys and opened the small cabinet, in which he kept brandy. He filled a glass, drank it, and then threw himself into a lounge-chair and resumed his cogitations.

Well, come what might, was his conclusion, Dolly would not desert him; to-morrow he would tell her everything, and, as General Pottinger said, her woman's wit would save him from the toils of the snarer. Mary should know nothing. His personal troubles removed, he would smash up the hostile confederacy amongst the hill tribes, and his brilliant services would be handsomely rewarded.

His natural optimism was now picturing even pleasanter castles in Spain, when the door communicating direct with the verandah was quietly opened from outside just wide enough to admit a man's body. A head was thrust in, and im-

mediately afterwards Fazl Ali presented himself.

He salaamed respectfully, then sat down on the rug at his master's left hand,—his usual position,—just as if the gap of time between his last and present appearance there, was twenty-four hours, instead of as many days.

Dissembling the intensity of his satisfaction that his reptile Munshi had delivered himself into the hands of a no-longer blind and confiding master, the Resident returned the man's salutation, and asked in his ordinary voice if he had enjoyed his holidays.

"Yes, sir, as far as my domestic affairs would permit," he answered, in the calm, level tones which Colonel Fitzhugh now associated with villainy.

As he spoke he looked up, and for an instant the eyes of master and man met. Each appeared to recognise something new in what he saw. The former interpreted the look as one of covert defiance, mixed with inquiring anxiety; the latter as one of suspicion and hostility.

After a few seconds of mutual thought-reading the servant lowered his eyes submissively, as if unable to bear longer the hardening scrutiny of his master.

Presently that master observed, "You seem bronzed and weathered, as if you had spent much of your time in the open air. You were not at Peshawer all your leave, I suppose?"

"Yes—no, I mean; I also had business away

from home," answered Fazl Ali with hesitation, wondering how much the *Sahib* knew.

"I thought so," dropped from his master, with dry, suggestive sharpness.

Another pause ensued, during which the Resident noticed that his Munshi was wearing a new Peshawer-made, embroidered waistcoat over a white muslin shirt with loose sleeves. An evil illumination rather than smile flitted over the Resident's face as he fixed his eyes upon the man's right wrist.

"Here, read that petition," he said abruptly, pushing a scrap of paper scribbled over in Persian character to the edge of the table nearest Fazl Ali.

The man mechanically stretched out his arm to receive the paper, and in so doing the wide sleeve dropped back a few inches. The master had a good view of what he sought to see—a large scar from an old wound or ulcer about three inches above the wrist.

The sight seemed to agitate Colonel Fitzhugh. He rose hastily, strode to the door, opened it, called the orderly on duty, and when the man came said he did not want him, and then shutting the door resumed his seat. Whatever his intention had been, he changed his mind. The little incident passed in a minute or less, and all the while Fazl Ali was reading the petition—a thing of no importance. He read it aloud in a more mechanical way than usual, his mind probably busy with the problem of the extent of

his master's knowledge. When he had finished he waited, pen between fingers, prepared to write the order which the Resident might give, and as no order came, he laid down the pen and again waited in silence.

Presently he inquired, in his ordinary business way, if the *Sahib* had had time to look through his accounts.

"No, not yet," was the curt reply.

"Then I suppose I had better take charge of them again and put them in order?" he suggested with unintentional eagerness.

"Impossible. I have impounded them," the Resident replied, with ostentatious deliberation.

"Indeed, sir? That will not help forward the settlement," said Fazl Ali contemptuously, his face assuming "the sculptured sneer" made historic by the first phrase-inventing Resident.

Stung by his manner and words, Colonel Fitz-hugh dropped his badly-fitting mask and said, "I know you, you hound! You have purposely kept my accounts back from me, and, I suspect, fudged them."

"They are open to inspection, sir," Fazl Ali remarked, unruffled, his self-control returning as he saw the angry *Sahib* losing his.

"That is not all," continued the Resident. "You are a spy, and have reported lies against me."

Fazl Ali started, but even now his self-possession did not desert him. His busy mind was working. How could the *Sahib* have learnt this?

and if he knew it, what more did he know? Surely the *Sahib* was not quite a fool, after all; and who was the traitor who had informed the Resident that he, Fazl Ali, was the Government news-writer?

"Will you repeat that again, sir. I may have misunderstood you," he requested presently, to gain time to decide on a line of action.

"You are a Government spy, and a lying spy to boot," repeated the Resident.

"I am, sir, the confidential news-writer of the Government of India, and paid as such by that Government," was Fazl Ali's calm correction. The Resident said nothing, so his man gathering more confidence proceeded—"And as for reporting lies, the facts can be ascertained by inquiry."

"You defy me then, devil!" shouted the Resident. "I shall have you arrested and consigned to jail at once."

"In which case the Government will order my immediate release," replied Fazl Ali, unmoved, having resolved that his line was to exasperate the Resident to the utmost, and so learn his whole hand.

"Government will not be aware of my action for some time," asserted Colonel Fitzhugh, almost faltering, remembering that Government was bound to protect their creature.

"I have friends," was the significant rejoinder.

"You aggravating devil!" hissed the Resident,

grinding his teeth and looking murderous, as he leant threateningly over the carpet-seated Munshi with a fist in menacing proximity to his head.

Fazl Ali involuntarily drew away from the seemingly infuriated madman. The man's look of terror and snake-like backward wriggle recalled Colonel Fitzhugh to his senses.

"You need not fear physical violence from me," he said with sarcastic slowness, calming down suddenly.

Then he struck his call-bell and the orderly on duty entered—a good-natured giant, a Muhammadan Rajput by clan, who loathed the smooth-faced, supercilious Munshi.

"Take Fazl Ali to the sergeant of my police-guard," the Resident ordered. "The sergeant is to handcuff him and make him over to the jail superintendent."

The big orderly saluted, and standing over the small Munshi, said, "Get up, and come"; at the same time he enforced obedience by placing a hand under one of the prisoner's arms and helping him to his feet.

The whole incident from the touch on the call-bell to the grip of the rough hand had passed very rapidly. Until that minute Fazl Ali had not realized that the Resident would be as good as his word. He heard the order given to the orderly, and he felt how it had been obeyed. He was standing now, no longer the obedient slave of the pen with the sphinx-like,

inscrutable face, but an angry man suffering from a gross indignity, who clung to the belief that in twenty-four hours or less he would triumph over his temporary victor.

"I have told you," he threatened, "I am the paid Government news-writer, and you dare not imprison me for that."

"That will not be the actual charge," Colonel Fitzhugh stated, in his blandest manner, though a hard, vindictive smile played about his mouth.

"Will you be so good as to name the charge then?" the prisoner requested, with cool effrontery, which was enhanced by the continued omission of the "sir."

"I have not yet looked up the numbers of the sections in the Penal Code," replied the Resident, with incisive precision of tone, "but they relate to burglary when armed with a dangerous weapon and causing hurt thereby."

"What? I a burglar! I use a dagger!" exclaimed the prisoner, unable to suppress his consternation.

"You have named the weapon. You heard him, orderly. Ha! ha! ha!"

Not yet quite beaten, Fazl Ali, with a sepulchral voice, like that of a man just told he has cholera, spluttered out, "There is—no—evidence against me."

"The scar above your wrist," the Resident informed him, "proves that you were the man who struck me that night."

Fazl Ali looked down at the tell-tale mark on

his fore-arm, saw the cicatrix, and allowed a scowl of vexation to settle on his face. When he walked into the trap and stretched up his arm for that petition he had forgotten what the fallen-back sleeve would disclose.

"I should have held you," continued his master, remorselessly rubbing it in, "had you not taken the precaution to grease your arms and chest as professional burglars do ; so even without using the knife you would have escaped."

Fazl Ali, all his bravado for the moment gone, listened to the indictment in silence and cursed his own mistakes.

The Resident, with sinister enjoyment, continued to torture the wretched man by reminding him of the well-known fact that most criminals who are caught and convicted owe their detection and its consequences to some stupid mistake. Fazl Ali heard and felt mad from impotent rage. It was all so true, what could he say ?

"The scar alone will not convict me," he presently objected.

"There is other evidence — the knife you dropped, for instance," remarked the Resident.

"There are hundreds of knives of that make," sneered Fazl Ali.

"Witnesses will swear it was yours."

"They will lie then," returned Fazl Ali.

"No matter ; they will be believed by the court," observed the Resident, with cold cynicism.

As he motioned to the orderly to remove the prisoner, the creature shouted at his torturer in

desperation, "I have still friends. You will yet regret this outrage, and that within twelve hours from now."

He tried to linger to see whether his vague threat had any effect, but a vigorous pull and push from his captor hastened his exit.

Colonel Fitzhugh, once more alone, began again to pace up and down the room in deep thought, depressed and anxious, for he knew his enemy still held good cards and would play them dexterously. How would it end? He repeatedly swept his open hand over his face, as if clearing away cobwebs which impeded the action of his brain. By degrees his agitation began to subside. He pulled out the folded legs of his lounge-chair, and threw himself on it. Bodily ease reacted on his nervous tension. What had been dark as a tempestuous night grew less gloomy, and soon came twilight; he could see a little now; then day broke—a foggy morning, no doubt, but the sun would dispel the fog and bright day would follow.

He recognised that, whatever his extravagance, there was no guilt in it; he was innocent even in thought of dishonest intention. A commission of inquiry could hardly be appointed. If it were, the ordeal would be terrible, and his poor wife would suffer agonies, but eventually he would be vindicated. Any other result would be impossible. A wretched, friendless native was always accorded justice, and however morally guilty, given the benefit of any doubt; how then could he, the successful political, the free-handed, fearless Eng-

lish gentleman, with hosts of friends, be held to have offended against the code of honour?

Again his optimism asserted itself; again rose castles in Spain before his mental vision; Mary, his darling wife, would be put to no suffering; Dolly, his little friend, his quondam saviour, would once again be his saviour, and he would—but his poor, worried brain was wearied out by now. The thought was not completed. Worn out, he slept.

Chapter XVII

SIGNS AND OMENS

THE Resident was awakened to his troubles by hearing some one address him by name. "Colonel Fitzhugh, I must speak to you," were the first words which he comprehended as he opened his blood-shot eyes and localised his faculties.

He saw young Lorimer standing beside him, and showing, by an eagerness of voice and gesture, which was at variance with his usually unemotional manner, that something extraordinary had moved him. Colonel Fitzhugh rose, and, whilst pushing the chair aside, remarked, with a purposeful assumption of indifference, that he had been caught napping for once.

"It's Fazl Ali I have come about," Lorimer explained, rushing straight into his subject.

"He has not escaped, has he?"

"No; he is in jail on your order, sir, safe enough, but without a warrant."

"Oh, well, that omission can be easily rectified; you have only to look up the section and fill in the form," said the Resident quietly, as if his Munshi's imprisonment were a matter of ordinary

routine; and forthwith he stated circumstantially what the charges were and the incidents out of which they had originated.

Lorimer listened deferentially to the end, restraining his impatience as best he could, and then burst forth, "But have you sufficiently weighed the surroundings of the step which you are taking?"

"What surroundings?" asked the Resident, maintaining his calmness. "It seems to me a simple enough case. The scoundrel has been, and is, or rather was until an hour or so ago, trying to destroy me; so I've spoilt his little game, that's all. Ha! ha! ha!"

The laugh was a discord, disclosing excitement and vindictiveness, both phenomena foreign to Colonel Fitzhugh's habit of good-natured superiority to the emotions exhibited by ordinary mortals. Young Lorimer's uneasiness increased.

"Fazl Ali is a dangerous man, sir," he asserted, "and your action will doubtless drive him to some desperate step."

"What if it does? How does that concern me?" asked the Resident sharply.

"If he feels that the court will hold it proved that he was in the museum that night when you were wounded, he will unscrupulously throw all the dirt he can on you."

"How can he besmirch me?" was the contemptuous query.

"Oh, sir, can't you see how?"

"No, I cannot."

Lorimer was distressed and hesitated — the ground was delicate. His manner annoyed his chief. "Come, out with it and drop circumlocution," said he roughly, with difficulty restraining his temper, for the boy was presuming, and required a set-down, he thought.

"I mean, sir," Lorimer explained, with halting reluctance, "he will drag—Miss Carew's name into the case, and very possibly—invent lies about you both to revenge himself on you through her."

"Pheugh ! that's the line of country, is it ? Miss Carew is a pure and noble girl, and won't care that"—and he snapped his fingers—"for any story a scoundrelly native may tell about her."

"But I care," said Lorimer, faltering. "I cannot endure the thought that her name will be in all the newspapers with odious calumnies attached to it."

"There's something in that," the Resident admitted, and he passed his open hand with weary perplexity over his brow and eyes—an action new to his observant assistant.

"Can you not find some other charge, sir— falsifying public accounts or misappropriating Government money, for instance ?" suggested Lorimer.

"No, for God's sake, neither of these !" cried Colonel Fitzhugh, a look of apprehension on his face ; "either would involve a full inquiry into the militia and—certain other frauds."

Lorimer was shocked to see the usually unmoved, self-reliant, easy-going Resident so utterly unstrung, and, but for a promise made to Dolly,

might have told him there and then about the improved aspect of his private affairs, if that were the trouble weighing on his mind.

"How would it do to charge him with inciting to disaffection, under section 124A of the Penal Code, or of plotting with the Queen's enemies?" Lorimer suggested feebly, at his wits' end to get out of the difficulty.

"Not at all; there is no proof. Besides—like the Ameer of Afghanistan—the hill Pechistanis are still officially our very good friends."

"There is a story going about that Fazl Ali is a kind of spy," Lorimer remarked, *à propos de bottes.*

"Yes, he is, but all the same he is the paid informer of Government—ha! ha! ha!" the Resident rasped out with a sardonic chuckle. But immediately recognising his mistake, he suppressed all signs of mental stress, and quietly repeated his original instructions, explaining that no other course was open, and that his cousin was such true metal she would not flinch from any cross-examination even if Fazl Ali employed as his counsel Sir Thomas Rattle himself, the leading member of the Lahore Bar. He was convinced, he said, that if the accused tried to throw dirt, and his counsel, under the cloak of instructions, sought to browbeat and insult Miss Dolly, there could be only one result—a heavier sentence on the prisoner and a loss of reputation for his counsel.

Lorimer, full of misgivings, went off to his work with the warrant properly drawn up and signed in

his pocket. On this occasion he did not pay a visit to the drawing-room, or even ask after the ladies ; his heart was too heavy to face either of them. He had grown superstitious of late ; some great catastrophe was impending ; prophecies of coming disaster to the little force of observation under Colonel Renny out in the Sherauna direction were flying about the bazaar ; indeed, rumour had already circumstantially killed that gallant officer more than once, had even cut up his Sikhs , whereas the truth was that both official reports and private letters represented the hill-men as friendly to effusiveness, readily supplying the camp with wood and grass on payment, and even inviting the officers to join in a bear hunt in their mountains.

The bazaar knew better ;¹ it was incredulous, would believe nothing good of hill Pathans, asserted that their only object was to throw the unsuspecting *Sahib lôg* off their guard till a chance offered to surprise and massacre them ; the jingling Pathan saying, "*Afghán be-imān*"—"The Afghan is faithless"—was as true then as it had been a century before , the cock would lay eggs before the hill-men would cease to be treacherous.

Such was bazaar opinion.

As Lorimer was walking over to his office con-

¹ It often does, but cries "wolf" so frequently that bazaar facts are rarely attended to When in August, 1897, the Mohmands raided the Shabkadar bazaar near Peshawer, the shopkeepers knew for days beforehand what was going to happen, and some moved to Peshawer for safety, but the civil authorities were taken by surprise.

sidering facts and rumours, and the Resident's proceedings against Fazl Ali, some large drops of rain fell, and were followed by a clap of thunder. He looked up, and saw two black clouds overhanging the station, which was now lying in shadow, whilst the valley and hills around and beyond remained in bright sunshine — an omen, he thought, of the trouble concentrating on those he loved or knew as friends. As the rain increased he turned up his coat collar, and ran for the shelter of his office.

Inside the Residency the light was now that of a gloomy twilight. The deep, low verandah running round the building made its rooms dark except in sunshine. The morning, still and brilliant, as February days generally are in Northern India, had advanced till noon without a sign of any change of weather. Noon had progressed towards sunset, and the stillness had become oppressive. About four o'clock the light had waned as abruptly as it does when an eclipse of the sun takes place. Of the two black clouds, the larger and denser seemed to have detached itself from the towers and pinnacles of the massive Kafir-Kot, which dominated the station, whilst the smaller had sailed up to meet it from the opposite direction.

Both the Resident and his wife were peculiarly susceptible to atmospheric disturbances. Electricity in the air depressed him, but gave her a nervous headache. An actual storm aggravated these symptoms.

The sudden patter of the raindrops outside, the quick transition from white sunshine to grey

dulness, and then the flash of lightning, immediately followed by a crack of thunder, which seemed to shake the substantially built Residency itself, startled Colonel Fitzhugh. He shivered as the door communicating with the verandah flew open and a rush of cold air invaded his sanctum. With a muttered curse on his lips he rose, looked out, saw the rain descending in torrents, and then hurriedly shut and bolted the door.

"Were I superstitious," he thought, "I should accept this turmoil as a portent, but of what? how should I read it? Only one way, of course—it symbolizes the bursting of the storm over my head. Ah! there's some one at the door."

It was Dolly with a cup of tea in her hands—Dolly looking charming as ever, but with no colour in her cheeks, and a certain troubled hesitancy in her manner.

"You have shut yourself up all the morning, George, and did not even come out of your den for lunch, so I've brought some tea in here; drink it at once, sir."

She spoke with cheerfulness, whilst noting with pain his wild appearance and the disarrangement of the furniture.

He did as he was bid, and thanked her in a few set words, as he might some obliging stranger.

"Why, what is the matter with you, George? Not afraid of the lightning surely, like Mary?" she inquired, commiserating his limp condition.

"I'm a little hipped to-day—liverish, I suppose. How is Mary?"

"Lying down in her room ; her head is bad. I have just come from her."

"Poor Mary!" he said ; "what a coward she is sometimes ! and then she is such a believer in omens. Now do you think, Dolly"—and here he dropped his voice to a whisper—"this extraordinary storm means anything ?"

"Yes, of course ; it means a return of cold weather—an atmospheric cleaning up, I suppose."

"Has it occurred to you that it may foretell trouble to me about those accounts and other matters ?"

"No ; how absurd you are to-day, George !" she answered bravely. "If it signifies anything personal to us—which is nonsense—it means the washing away of all our troubles. Why, look ! there is the sun shining again. You will accept that as a happy omen, you foolish old man. Now good-bye ; I must be off to Mary."

"What a dear girl you are, Dolly !" he said, detaining her ; "and what a devil I was ! You forgive me, don't you ?"

He spoke so simply and looked so humble, so different to his old, imperious, passionate self, that Dolly was touched, and in spite of her resolution to keep him at a distance, impulsively put her cheek against his, and answered,—

"We were fond of each other and unhappy, that was all ; we are wiser now. There, I have kissed you like a sister." And she had. "There is nothing in this wide world I would not do for you."

"I am sure of it," he said, with conviction and an effort to throw off his depression. "You had better go to Mary, and be a ministering angel to her, as you have been to me."

She left, and he was again alone. Her visit had cheered him. He put by his papers, and was preparing to go out, intending to ask Dolly to walk with him, as he wished to tell her of his doings with Fazl Ali, when an urgent official telegram was handed in. It was from the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, and ran thus :—"The Government news-writer, one Fazl Ali, states he has been suddenly arrested and thrown into prison as a spy. If so, release him immediately. Wire compliance."

On reading this order the Resident grinned exultingly, and thought how wise he had been in framing the warrant as he had done. Evidently Fazl Ali had convinced himself the charges of house-breaking by night, and feloniously wounding the Resident, would, after all, not be brought from fear that thereby Miss Carew's reputation might suffer. The despatch of a wire to Calcutta, and receipt of the orders for his release within a few hours of the arrest, showed what a strong backing the man had both locally and at the head-quarters of the Government of India.

So thinking, the Resident pulled out a book of blank telegraph forms, which was kept in a side-drawer of his table, and sat down to compose a suitable reply. After spoiling several forms, he signed his name to the following reply :—

"Fazl Ali is not charged as a spy, but with a non-bailable offence ; hence it is impossible to release him. Kindly explain difference between spy and news-writer. The connection of either with the Government is not understood."

This answer diverted the Resident's mind from the forebodings which had been depressing it. Good though his reply was, it did not entirely satisfy him. He would have preferred to force Government to disavow their agent or face the storm of indignation the *exposé* of the vile system would have raised. He did not quite see his way to go nearer the end in view than he had done ; possibly his assistant might be able to help him in his dilemma. He put the Government telegram and his draft reply into an envelope and hurried over to Lorimer's bungalow—the "great" man going to the "small" man, a reversal of procedure evidencing the mental dislocation now observable in the formerly masterful George Fitzhugh.

Lorimer read both telegrams, and returned them without remark.

"Well," said the Resident impatiently, "what do you think of them ? "

"That Fazl Ali means fighting, and your telegram makes it impossible for Government to interfere further at this stage."

"Then I fail to some extent in my object," said the Resident excitedly. "I want to expose this espionage system. Can't you suggest a stronger wording ? "

"It is too strong already, sir, I think," replied

Lorimer, in his most judicial manner, "for it is covertly insubordinate, yet disables Government from protecting their agent."

"It will have that effect, then?"

"Yes, certainly."

Not wholly satisfied, the Resident decided to consult his friend, Sir Atwell Pottinger, and went over to that veteran's quarters.

Lorimer watched Colonel Fitzhugh's retreating figure, and noticed how he switched the air with his stick as he walked, and decapitated the few flowers in the beds by the drive up to the house. It was the first time that the hitherto self-reliant Resident had ever sought his assistant and asked his advice ; that of itself showed a certain weakening of mind ; and then his jerky movements, and the savage way in which he struck at unoffending flowers, what did it all mean ? Was Colonel Fitzhugh going to break down from the strain of his heavy responsibilities, just at the time when he should be coolest and make the fullest use of all his faculties ?

Meanwhile he had disappeared into General Pottinger's quarters, and Lorimer, himself nervous and apprehensive, went back to finish his work.

The General read the telegrams, and listened with grunts of satisfaction to the narration of the encounter between his friend and "Mr. Yellow-Face," as he called Fazl Ali. As the story progressed to its climax his interest increased. His pipe was still in his mouth, but for minutes now he had forgotten it. At the point when Fazl Ali's

exit was accelerated by a push and a pull from the big orderly, and the Munshi disappeared from view, the General let the pipe drop from between his teeth and gave vent to his feelings.

"Capital!" he exclaimed, slapping his knees. "Done him brown at last; but had you found him out and locked him up a year ago, all this bother would have been avoided. You politicals are always blind; under the candle darkness, eh?"

"Then you think I acted rightly, and my reply can go?" the Resident asked.

"Yes; could not be better, though I almost wish you had quodded Mr. Yellow-Face as a spy. As it is, your action will end this d----d un-English system."

"I'll walk over to the telegraph office and send the reply myself," said Colonel Fitzhugh, rising to go.

"You trust no one now, eh?" inquired the General, laughing.

"Never a native again," was the reply, delivered with unnecessary solemnity.

When he had gone, Sir Atwell refilled his pipe, and threw himself into his easiest chair. The tobacco smoke ascended lazily about his nostrils and short grey hair, and helped to induce a state of reflective self-satisfaction. As a plain fighting man, his own career had been fairly successful, he thought, but, by Jove! had he been a soldier-political instead, he would have risen to the peerage. His intuition in reading the workings of native minds was marvellous. Here was this

Fitzhugh, twenty years or so a political, and only now awake to the fact that no native could be trusted. Fitzhugh would probably come out of this business with flying colours. Well, so much the better for Fitzhugh, but the real credit would be his, General Sir Atwell Pottinger's, for he had exposed Mr. Yellow-Face, and saved the creature's master from ruin.

"No native can deceive me; I read them easier than I do children, eh?" chuckled the veteran, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and prepared for his evening ride.

Chapter XVIII

THE ASSASSIN'S BULLET

ABOUT five that afternoon the sun pierced the clouds, which were gathering their forces over Kafir-Kot, and flooded station and valley with a sheen of glory. But as the light of day departed, the powers of darkness, reinforced from all sides, waxed strong, and the change of weather, indicated by the afternoon's storm, became pronounced.

By nightfall the whole sky had become overcast. Not a star was visible ; blackness reigned supreme everywhere. Mutterings of thunder were heard in the direction of the western tangle of mountains. Presently lightning flashed over Kafir-Kot, throwing out its rugged outline against the dark setting of the firmament—like the picture of a vast gloomy castle in a vaster frame of inky blackness. The flashes became frequent, the roar of thunder almost continuous ; and all the while the pitiless rain descended in torrents, as if a new flood were about to overspread the earth.

"See," cried Dolly, who with George beside her was standing in a sheltered corner of the west verandah, watching the battle of the elements ; "see," she cried, "the war of the giants has begun. How grand it would be to sit secure and silent in some unexposed nook up there"—and she pointed to Kafir-Kot—"and witness the conflict going on all around us ; we should be in the thick of it"

"Grand ?" he demurred, shivering. "Surely all the devils in hell are loose to-night, and madly raging for the possession of those dismal towers. What does it all mean, Dolly ? Has the last day come ?"

He asked the two questions in a rapid whisper, and clutched her arm. Between the flashes the girl saw a blanched, drawn face, with straining eyes peering into hers.

"You old goose !" she said, drawing his hand under her cloak, and so encompassing his cold fingers with warmth.

"It is terrible. I cannot stand it much longer," he complained into her ear ; "let us go in and have all the lamps lit and the curtains drawn. I am sure something awful is going to happen."

"What a coward you have become of late, George !" she declared, with an effort at buoyancy. "I am ashamed of you. Cheer up, old man."

She felt his arm trembling, and the thought went through her mind that he might be sickening for a serious illness. She put her hand over his wrist,

and tried to judge how his pulse was beating. It was quick and strong, but irregular.

"Are you unwell?" she asked.

"No—at least I don't think so. The dread of some impending catastrophe is on me."

"Too much work and worry, I expect," she suggested.

"I shall be better when the Moharram is over, I hope."

"When will that be?"

"To-morrow is the last day," he answered.

"Are you in pain?" she inquired, the idea that he was ill again taking possession of her.

"I am tired, so tired here," he explained, touching his eyes and forehead.

"It's nothing, I'm sure; but if you do take to your bed, I shall be your nurse," she said, and she pressed his arm with a sense of protection.

"Ha! Did you not hear a noise in the opposite corner of the verandah?" he whispered.

"Yes; but there are noises everywhere to-night, and that was one of them—a chair blown over or something."

"More like a footfall—a man's stealthy tread. Let go my arm. I'll seize the ruffian."

As he spoke they felt themselves as if enveloped in a sheet of flame, and at the same instant a terrific crash overhead, followed immediately by a sound like a thudding blow, appalled them both.

"Come, let us go in," she cried. "Something has been struck!"

They hurried inside, and went direct to Mary's

drawing-room. But Mary was not to be found. They had left her on the couch where George had laid her, and she had since been listening to the storm, and watching the flashes through the windowed door. The curtains had only been half drawn, and the room, but for a feeble glow from the wood-fire in the grate, was in darkness.

Though Mary was afraid of lightning, or rather of thunder, for the noise, more than the actual danger of being struck, affected her nervous temperament, some curious fascination had induced her to lie there, a timid observer of the infernal din without. She had been poorly all day, and had preferred solitude to the companionship of husband or cousin, though the latter had often been in to see her, and had brought her tea or soup at intervals. Just before dinner, George had sat with her, and had insisted that she was an invalid, though his manner was so strange that she thought he required nursing more than she did.

He had been unusually kind and tender to her, and when the dinner gong had sounded, he stooped over her and kissed her. Responsively she had put her arms round his neck, and uttered some endearing words. He laughed a little wildly, called to her to hold tight, and without a word whisked her off in his arms, and carried her down the passage from her room into the drawing-room. There he laid her on the couch, and put an eider-down quilt over her. Then, with a strange look on his face, he whispered to her, "Lie still and watch over me."

At first she did so to humour him, as his manner was peculiar—"uncanny," as the Scotch say; then the fancy came to her she would lie there until he should come and carry her back. She heard him talking with Dolly and meek Mr. Gubbins in the dining-room, and Dolly had come to her twice and given her soup and pudding. Then Mr. Gubbins joined her in the drawing-room for a little, whilst the other two went out to see the storm; and though she shook at every peal, and shut her eyes at every flash, she lay on and on, physically warm and comfortable, but spiritually prostrate, incapable of clear thought or movement.

When the last terrific flash and crash occurred, her powers of volition were suddenly restored. With a bound she was up, and screaming "Baby! baby!" rushed off to the nursery, there to find her darling sleeping soundly, with an angelic smile on his rosebud mouth.

Seeing the couch unoccupied, Dolly cried out, "She's with Alan," and ran to the nursery, George following. Presently all three returned, and whilst Mary was lying down again, George went to the windowed door to pull the light curtains closer. His hand was on the curtain, and he had given it a first jerk forwards—for curtain poles and rings are not mutually accommodating in Northern India—when he started back, exclaiming, "There's some one outside. I saw eyes which met mine."

"It's a cat wanting to come in, and no wonder,"

suggested Dolly bravely, though beginning to feel creepy herself.

"Perhaps—all the same, I'll go and make sure."

He moved towards the door, but Mary grasped his arm as he passed her, and implored him not to leave her in the dark.

"All right. I'll stir the fire up," he replied.

He put more wood on, thereby making the weird, flickering light in the room feebler than it had been before.

"Do order the bearer to bring in the lamps," came Mary's voice from the sofa.

"I'll fetch one from the dining-room. The bearer is probably in his hut hubble-bubbling to keep the cold and wet out," said Dolly, moving to the door, which opened into the dining-room.

"What has become of Mr. Gubbins?" asked Mary. "He left me here alone half an hour ago without a word."

George, who was now vigorously blowing up the fire, for the wood was damp and would not burn readily, did not hear the question, and took no notice.

"It's a fast day, so I suppose he is in his room meditating or writing his sermon or something," Dolly called back as she disappeared into the dining-room.

She returned presently, carrying in her hands a large table-lamp. George sprang up from his stooping position by the spluttering fire to relieve her from the burden. Whilst he was doing so, Dolly, who was facing the verandah entrance, started violently, but pluckily held on to the lamp,

and between them they set it down on the nearest table.

"You were right, for I saw a face pressed against the panes, where the curtain is open," Dolly whispered with a steady voice to George.

"It's the sentry, perhaps," he suggested, to reassure her.

"No," she objected; "he's on the other side of the house, by your office. Besides, the head was unturbaned."

"Please turn the light up," urged Mary from where she lay.

Her husband stretched out his hand to do so, when Dolly screamed, "Don't! don't! put it out!"

At the same instant a pane of glass was broken, and through it was thrust the barrel of a gun or rifle.

"Get into the passage," cried Dolly, throwing herself between George and the barrel.

There followed almost instantaneously a scream from the direction of the sofa, the crack of a shot, a cry of "Oh God!" from Dolly, a wild clasping of her body by George, a sweep of her arm against the lamp, a crash as its globe, chimney, and crystal reservoir fell shattered on the floor, then momentary silence and complete darkness.

George remained standing, dazed and stupefied, holding Dolly in his arms. He felt her slipping—slipping, as if she were helpless and unable to keep upright.

"You are—not—hit—are you?" she gasped, with feeble articulation.

"No; but, good God! you are," he cried in agony, as he realized that the body he held was limp, and that it was her blood which was making his hands wet and sticky.

"No matter—you are safe," she managed to whisper, and then her head drooped back upon his shoulder, and all that he held was now a lifeless weight. With remarkable self-possession he called to his wife to escape by the door into the passage,—not dining-room, as the lights were still burning there,—and with Dolly in his arms began to move cautiously in that direction himself.

He had just reached the door when another shot was fired into the dark room, and the bullet struck the over-mantel or some ornament about it, for there was a clatter of broken glass falling. It flashed through his mind that had he not moved the bullet would have struck him or Dolly, also that the murderer could not be accustomed to handle breech-loaders, as he had been so long in putting in a fresh cartridge and firing his second shot.

By this time he was fumbling with his free hand for the handle of the door.

"Mary, Mary," he whispered, afraid to reveal his position, "why don't you come? Where are you?"

There was no answer. What should he do? Carry Dolly out first, or go back for his wife at once? Before he could decide he heard sounds in the verandah—feet running, a scuffle, cries of "Seize him!" and then another shot and another from somewhere outside the house. The guard

has turned out, he thought. He shouted, "Lights! bring lights! come quickly!" He heard a commotion in the passage, voices encouraging each other, urging each other to do this and that, and then almost simultaneously both dining-room and passage doors were opened, and immediately afterwards his old bearer Jiwan,—his faithful servant for twenty years,—his Madrassi butler, and some of the other servants were standing round him.

The streams of light from passage and dining-room enabled him to see objects in the room. One glance told him much : Dolly lay like a corpse in his arms, with blood about her dress, and lips, and on his hands ; Mary was on the floor beside the sofa evidently in a fainting condition ; lamp and over-mantel mirror were smashed, and the light curtain was fluttering in the draught blowing in through the pane which the assassin had broken when inserting his rifle-barrel.

Telling his bearer to go for Doctor Jones at once, he carried Dolly to her room and laid her tenderly on her bed ; then he hurried back to the drawing-room and lifted Mary on to the sofa.

As he was doing so his guest, Mr. Gubbins, with a lighted candle in his hand, came into the room and asked what had happened.

"Murder, I fear ; but see to my wife, whilst I return to Dolly," replied Colonel Fitzhugh.

Though white and frightened, the young chaplain was self-possessed, and at once began to do what was necessary to restore the fainting woman to consciousness. Seeing that he understood his

work, Colonel Fitzhugh went back to Dolly's room. Her Ayah was already there seated on the floor rocking her body and crooning out that her dear *Missy Sahib* had been killed.

"She is alive, you old fool. If you can't be useful, be off with you!" said Colonel Fitzhugh angrily.

"What can I do? I am not the doctor *Sahib*," the woman protested, deeply offended.

"Get me scissors, rags, handkerchiefs, cotton-wool, and tear a sheet into strips," he wildly ordered, hardly knowing what he was saying.

After fumbling about the dressing-table, she found the scissors and a number of small embroidered cambric squares, and handed them to her master. He cut open the dress and laid his hand over the heart, and soon assured himself it was still beating. He next tried to localise the wound. The bullet had entered her back somewhere between the shoulders, but what had become of it he knew not. He put a pad made up of the handkerchiefs over the spot whence blood was trickling out, and tried to make a compress with strips of the torn sheet; but he was clumsy and ignorant, and his further meddling seemed likely to increase the bleeding, now ceasing. He gave up in despair. He felt himself awfully helpless. He dared not move her from fear of renewing the haemorrhage, which externally, at least, had now almost stopped.

Many thoughts filled his mind as he stood there dry-eyed and remorse-stricken, unable to do anything to save her who had twice saved him, and

was lying there with her life-blood draining away,—his sacrifice, immolated for him, the man who, all self, had caused her, all unselfishness, to love him. He leant over her and reverently kissed her bloodless lips. He called her his love, his darling, his saviour ; he implored her to give some sign ; but none was vouchsafed, unless, perhaps, a moan or tremor of the eyelids. As he sat watching her, now impatiently pulling out his watch, now beseeching her not to die and leave him, now imploring God to intervene and save her—to at least revive her long enough for him to obtain forgiveness,—the Ayah came close to him and said in her broken English, “ See, master know nothing ; only doctor *Sahib* know. Then why master call Ayah old fool ? ”

Colonel Fitzhugh took no notice, so the creature went back to her corner and resumed her rocking and crooning. Some minutes passed, when Mr. Gubbins appeared at the door and whispered that Mrs. Fitzhugh had recovered consciousness and was asking for him.

“ Take my place here,” said Colonel Fitzhugh grudgingly.

The chaplain took the vacated chair, and gazed with awe and pity at the lifeless figure on the bed, so still, so white, so beautiful. His eyes filled with tears, and he, too, stooped reverently over her ; but he only touched her hand with his.

Unlike the priest, the soldier-political had remained throughout the ordeal dry-eyed—a hunted, almost haunted, despairing man.

Chapter XIX

SUFFERING AND EXPIATION

COLONEL FITZHUGH hurried to his wife, who was still on the sofa in the drawing-room, and kneeling beside her, took her hand in his and said he thanked God she was safe. He would perhaps have kissed her, but she turned her face to the wall with a cry of horror, "Don't! don't! you are all blood!"

"From Dolly's wound," he explained; "she was shot, you know."

"Is she dead?" asked his wife, in horror.

"Dying, I fear," and the hard, hunted look on his face grew harder.

"I must get up to help her," Mary announced, with sudden determination.

She struggled to her feet, but her weakness was great. With her husband's arm around her she staggered towards the door. Near it she noticed the splashes of blood on the carpet and shuddered at the sight; her body swayed; her terror was pitiful.

"Blood! it's all blood! I am all blood too!" she shrieked, looking at the hand which her husband's

had clasped ; then she fainted. He carried her to her room, and whilst he was chafing her hands, fanning her, and wondering if he could get salvolatile, or burnt feathers, or what he should do, his old bearer came in to say that Dr. Jones had arrived.

"Send him to Miss Carew first, and then come back here," said Colonel Fitzhugh.

When Jiwan returned Colonel Fitzhugh slipped out of the room and went to Dolly's. Dr. Jones was already at work there, and requested that no one should remain but the Ayah ; so host and guest departed—the former to his wife, the latter to hang about the passage and be of any use he could. On Mary's regaining consciousness Colonel Fitzhugh, who had meanwhile changed his clothes and washed his hands, gave her some brandy. She was calmer now, as there was nothing visible to recall the scene of the tragedy. She smiled at her husband, asked him what the time was, and how long he intended to remain in her room. Her manner and questions added to his distress, for it was evident she was suffering from shock, and that her memory, if not her mind, was temporarily impaired. She asked no questions about Dolly. After a time she lay passive, holding George's hand in hers and speaking to him of trivialities. When Dr. Atherby-Jones came into the room, his coat-cuffs turned back and showing some inches of shirt-sleeves, she stared at him with a puzzled air and whispered to her husband, "Who is that rude man ?"

"The doctor, dear. He has come to see you."

"But I am not ill, am I?"

"You are poorly, dear, for you have had a fainting fit," her husband explained.

Dr. Jones was now standing beside her bed, attempting to feel her pulse. Mary made no resistance,—indeed, had ceased to notice him,—and was talking childishly to her husband, when the voice of the doctor interrupted her confidences.

"Mrs. Fitzhugh requires rest and nourishment, that is all," he remarked, in the quiet, matter-of-fact way habitual to him.

Mary turned her head and appeared to try to concentrate her faculties on the speaker. Unfortunately, some drops of blood were visible on his shirt-sleeves. She saw them. The late tragedy must have flashed upon her, for she screamed, "Blood! more blood! Oh, take him away—the murderer!"

"Yes, dear, he'll go," said her husband soothingly, and he nodded to the doctor, who at once withdrew.

His disappearance quieted Mary a little, and in a few minutes she closed her eyes. When satisfied that she was either asleep or dozing George slipped away on tiptoe, and found Dr. Jones coming out of Dolly's room.

"Well," he asked, almost fiercely, "will she recover?"

"Impossible to say," the doctor replied, shaking his head, "till the course of the bullet is known, and it is extracted."

"Are any vital parts touched?"

"The right lung appears to have been pierced or touched, but there is very little internal haemorrhage. I have given Miss Carew a sedative, and all I can say is that the case is not hopeless."

"Thank you for that," said George, his now moistened eyes showing what a relief such a crumb of comfort was to him.

Mr. Gubbins, who was standing by listening, also expressed satisfaction, and asked if he might get a blanket and pillow and pass the night outside Miss Carew's door, in case help was wanted. The doctor appreciated his modest devotion, and said that he would be now more useful inside the room, if he would take a share of night-watching until a professional nurse could be obtained.

"I can do that myself," interposed Colonel Fitzhugh excitedly.

"Hardly," objected the doctor, with quiet decision; "Mrs. Fitzhugh requires nursing. Moreover, you are ill yourself, and must have sleep."

"Faugh! sleep for me!" he cried in scorn; "I have work to do to-night. And, besides, how can you expect me to sleep with my wife out of her mind and—Miss Carew—probably dying?"

"Mrs. Fitzhugh is hysterical, that is all; and as for Miss Carew, her youth and splendid constitution will give her every chance," said Dr. Jones quietly.

Colonel Fitzhugh had to submit, and went off down the passage towards his wife's room. The doctor followed him with his eyes, and turning to

Mr. Gubbins, tapped his own forehead significantly and observed, "I fear the Resident will soon require nursing himself." So saying he returned to Dolly's room, whilst Mr. Gubbins went to his, to try to get some rest before the hour fixed for his watch by the wounded girl's bed.

George had, meanwhile, noiselessly opened the door of his wife's room, and looked in. He saw that she was asleep, and that his child's Scotch nurse, Margaret, was beside her. The woman came to the door and whispered that Jiwan, the bearer, was with baby, who would not wake until morning, and that she would sit up with her mistress until then. Her master nodded and thanked her.

"And how is Miss Dolly, sir?" asked Margaret, putting a corner of her apron to her eyes.

"Very bad. Don't ask me!" he cried in anguish at the thought of losing her, and he turned hastily away.

"Poor master!" reflected Margaret; "how his troubles do weigh on him!"

He wandered about restlessly for some time, and then put on a great-coat and went out, taking an orderly with him to carry a lantern. He knew that the sentry would be jumpy, and m'ght shoot him by mistake were he not careful—such an accident had happened in Peshawer. He went over to the guard-room and roused the sergeant.

"Was the murderer secured?" he asked

"Yes, *Sahib*."

"How was the capture effected?"

The sergeant explained that on hearing the first shot the sentry on duty had crept round the house, but that it was so dark he had not discovered the position of the *ghāzi*—as he called the murderer—until the second shot was fired. The guard had meanwhile turned out. The *ghāzi* got confused, ran this way and that way, and was twice fired upon at close quarters, and one bullet had hit him.

"Where is he?" asked Colonel Fitzhugh.

"In there, if he's not dead yet," said the sergeant nonchalantly, pointing to a small lock-up attached to the Residency, which was used on emergencies.

"I'll see him," said Colonel Fitzhugh. "If he is still alive I'll send the doctor to him shortly."

"Of course, *Sahib*, he ought to be patched up to be hung and burnt to-morrow," remarked the sergeant, with unconscious humour.

They found the prisoner huddled up in a corner groaning pitifully. He had tied his turban round his waist, having been shot in the stomach. Colonel Fitzhugh sent a sepoy to summon Dr. Jones, and holding the lantern near the dying wretch, was astonished to recognise in him a dismissed Pathan garden-coolie of his own. The man involuntarily, though suffering awful agony, salaamed and stared with terror, as if he had seen an apparition.

"So," said the Resident, in a hard voice, "you meant to kill me, but shot the Miss *Sahib* instead."

The prisoner moaned, "Then I am no martyr, after all, and my family will not receive the hundred rupees."

"Was that my price?" the Resident asked sharply, annoyed perhaps at the pettiness of his valuation.

The prisoner nodded.

"Who was to pay it?" was the next question.

"Fazl Ali. I entered his service when you dismissed me," was the answer.

"Take note of every word he says," whispered the Resident to the sergeant; "he may die before he makes a formal confession, or more likely he will refuse to speak when he sees strange faces and pen and ink in front of him."

Then little by little the full particulars were extracted from the assassin. Upon his dismissal he had found himself destitute. He thought he had been wrongly turned adrift, and besought Fazl Ali to obtain his reinstatement, but the Munshi *Sahib* had refused, had told him it was impossible, as the Resident *Sahib* was a hard, cruel master and distrusted Pathans. Then by degrees Fazl Ali had excited his cupidity and desire for revenge. As a good Musalman, who had been unjustly treated by an infidel white man, it was his duty to take the life of his persecutor. He objected that he had not the courage to kill a *Sahib*; he wanted food, not the rope. Why should he do such a deed and be hanged for it? Fazl Ali kept him waiting on, allowing him two annas a day only, then was himself imprisoned. From the jail the Munshi sent

him an order to kill the *Sahib* at once, otherwise he should starve. If he did the job he should receive Rs100 in cash and obtain employment with the next Resident *Sahib*. He agreed, and was given a carbine and a packet of cartridges. Still he wavered, fearing the rope and the burning, but he had lately married, and the thought oppressed him that his young wife would starve, or, more likely, be tempted from poverty to desert him and go to some native officer. Overcome by his anxiety for his wife—the idea of scruples had never occurred to him—he took the rifle, and, knowing the bungalow and the habits of the inmates, had lain in wait, and fired two shots.

When he had told his story, Colonel Fitzhugh said mercilessly, "You will be hanged to-morrow, then burnt; so you have missed martyrdom and lost your reward and your young wife as well."

"Have pity, Lord *Sahib*! think of my wife starving," grovelled the wretch.

"Starving? She will easily solace her widowhood. Young women are always valuable," scoffed the Resident.

"Have pity, Lord *Sahib*; I did not kill you," he moaned, with his hands to his stomach.

"But you shot an unoffending Miss *Sahib*."

"She was only a woman," groaned the creature, incapable of feeling remorse.

The Resident turned away in disgust, and meeting Dr. Jones, waited outside until he should complete his examination of the man's wound.

"I can keep him alive for twenty-four hours,

I expect, if that will do," the doctor reported, a few minutes later.

"That will do excellently ; but don't drug him : let him feel it all," returned Colonel Fitzhugh, with vengeful satisfaction. "Lorimer will try him in the morning, and he shall swing in the evening."

* * * * *

Patched up by Dr. Atherby-Jones, the wretched assassin survived his trial, and was duly hanged and his body burnt. Both execution and burning were public, experience having at last taught Government that, in cases of fanatical outrage, an execution and burial within the precincts of the jail had practically no deterrent effect.

At his trial Fazl Ali's dupe had been sullen and indifferent, and had refused to answer any questions, but when he realized that in a few hours he would literally be dust and ashes his anguish was terrible. He forgot his physical sufferings, now diminishing, as mortification had set in, and from a dumb bravado passed to the wordy reviling of his enemies. He cursed Fazl Ali for having caused him to commit the crime, and he raved at young Lorimer, his judge, and all other infidels, for their devilish cruelty in denying him the glories of martyrdom.

His body burnt and his ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven, he could have no tomb, no shrine over his grave, at which the faithful would light lamps and pray ; and then, reduced to impalpable dust, how could he enter Paradise, and enjoy, *vice* his fleshly bride—who would speedily

console herself—the embraces of celestial *houris* for ever more?

He was comparatively passive at the scaffold, Dr. Jones having mercifully disregarded the Resident's vindictive order and given the wretch a dose of morphia.

Chapter XX

DE PROFUNDIS

THE murderous outrage on poor Dolly, the swift vengeance on her assassin—should she die—and the leaking out of the fact that there was good evidence that the crime had been perpetrated at the instance of the Resident's own confidential Munshi, caused a deep sensation throughout the station. Public opinion demanded that Colonel Fitzhugh should take immediate proceedings against Fazl Ali himself. His vile instrument had been at once tried, executed, and burnt, why, then, should not the viler instigator of the crime be dealt with in the same way?

The reasoning was sound.

The perplexed Resident was sorely tempted to take the bit between his teeth, and at once put Fazl Ali on his trial under the Frontier Outrage Regulation, but he wavered and consulted, and finally decided not to act with precipitation, as the cases were not parallel, and the evidence against his Munshi was only that of his alleged instrument, supported by the facts that the assassin had been in that Munshi's service, and had used his rifle. The proof could hardly be called conclusive, as the

said assassin might be lying, might have stolen the rifle, and had by his own confession a private grudge against Colonel Fitzhugh. Then, further, had Fazl Ali been launched into eternity before he had been tried on the charges entered in his warrant, the Government of India might have suspected that his removal had been hastened by the Resident to save himself from the awkwardness of meeting the counter accusations made by the Munshi.

These were the arguments which saved Fazl Ali from swinging beside his tool, poor Dolly's murderer.

During the day Colonel Fitzhugh's collected, business-like manner had surprised his friends. His expression showed a settled sadness, and his eyes an unusual restlessness, but otherwise he succeeded, when in the presence of his friends at least, in concealing all signs of the awful anxiety which filled his mind. Alone, shut up in his office, he gave way to his feelings, sometimes sitting stunned and broken-hearted, a victim of despair, sometimes pacing the room, and mingling prayers with maledictions.

At the trial he had given his evidence quietly and simply, without any appearance of vindictiveness, or even feeling, except that his voice faltered when he described his cousin's act of self-sacrificing devotion. His evidence recorded, he had hurried home, and was not seen until the time of the execution. As soon as the noose had been adjusted, and the drop had fallen, he had again returned to

the Residency. His wish to be alone as much as possible was so natural that no one intruded upon his solitude.

The Rev. Josiah Gubbins, as soon as it was light, had moved over to a spare room in Lorimer's bungalow. His departure had been a relief to his host, who seemed to resent the idea that any one should share his sufferings or anxieties. Early in the forenoon Dr. Jones had sent over a nurse, one Sister Dora, a Roman Catholic, who was attending another case, which was not very urgent. She had been given charge of Dolly, and from that hour Colonel Fitzhugh had not been allowed into the sick-room. The patient's temperature had risen to 102° , and at times she was restless, but otherwise her condition was unchanged.

As for Mary, she was quieter, but was still subject to hallucinations from the shock, and her memory was impaired—the latter a happy dispensation, Dr. Jones said, because anything which brought back the night's tragedy to her mind, produced a fit of hysterical screaming. She appeared to be quite happy when playing with her child or chatting with her husband. A curious feature in the case was that she never mentioned Dolly's name, and seemed for the time to have forgotten the existence of her cousin. She was very affectionate with her husband, rallied him on looking so grave and sorrowful when he had such a charming wife and child, both of whom adored him, and asked him to promise to take furlough, and accompany her home, should Dr. Jones, who was keeping her in bed so unneces-

sarily, decide that she was not strong enough to remain out in India.

"Yes, darling, of course, if you are ill I'll come home with you," he promised, to keep her quiet.

"What a nice holiday we shall have, won't we?" she said, pleased with the prospect before her.

"Of course!" he echoed lugubriously.

"You don't mean what you say a bit," she returned with petulance; "for if you did, you would be delighted, instead of looking and speaking as if you had just buried me."

"I am sorry, dear, but I have, you know, many anxieties just now."

"Anxieties?" she repeated; "what an excuse! It only shows how little you think of me. As if I should not be more to you than your work!"

"I am always thinking of you," he assured her; "but, for God's sake, be sensible. You know those Pechistanis are threatening a rising, and Government won't listen to my advice."

"Those horrid hill-people! Oh, yes, I remember," she said, and her voice fell to a frightened whisper, as she looked nervously towards the door. Then turning to her husband, she cried out imploringly, "George, dear George, let us get away from this dreadful place."

"Yes, soon, dear, I hope," he responded.

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" she repeated, flinging her arms about his neck, by turns crying and laughing in hysterical confusion of mind.

Then suddenly the whole terror of the previous night's scenes must have recurred to her, for she

shrieked, "Dolly died for your sake. It is always Dolly ; and now you mourn her and cannot love me any more."

"Hush, darling ; Dolly may hear. She is alive, and may recover, if we keep her very quiet."

"It's always Dolly," she moaned, subsiding into calmness and talking to herself, "and I am nothing. I ought to hate her for taking my husband away from me, and yet I cannot. She saved his life and gave up her own for him."

It was torture to the stricken man to have to listen, to sit helplessly beside her, and feel how truly she had read him, and how unselfish and forgiving was her nature. He fidgeted in his chair, caressed her hand, then laid it down again. Suddenly he rose, seeing a man's arm thrust in through the door, which stood ajar. It was waving impatiently, evidently beckoning to him to come out.

"I'll come back presently, dear. There's some one outside wanting me," he whispered to his wife.

"First give me my medicine, George. It may help me to sleep for a little. I am in pain and worn out."

He measured out the draught, and she swallowed it, and lay back, closing her eyes. He then went to the door and saw Lorimer in the passage. The boy looked almost as ill as his chief.

"Will you come outside with me, sir, at once ?" he said ; "I have important news for you."

"Something serious, I judge from your face. Can't you tell me here ?"

"No—too near them," Lorimer replied, indicating the sick rooms, and moving towards the front-door.

When outside Lorimer handed a scrap of paper to the Resident, and said, "A trooper has just brought this in from the Sherauna outpost." It was a hurried scrawl in pencil, without date, and with an illegible signature, and ran as follows:—

"Colonel Renny and his force, whilst being entertained by tribal chiefs at Maizar, were treacherously attacked by them. All the British officers, and over fifty of the native troops, were either killed or wounded. The force retreated on this post, and are now coming in."

The Resident read it over twice, and handed it back to his assistant, saying with concentrated bitterness, "When will our officers learn wisdom? I warned Renny to beware of treachery, and he has walked straight into a trap. I am most sorry for young Lee, as I sent the boy out."

"It is believed that he is safe, sir," Lorimer stated. "The trooper says both he and his native assistant were spared by the enemy."

"Spared? How surprisingly humane—a case for the bestowal of medals for saving life, no doubt," the Resident exclaimed sarcastically.

"General Pottinger proposes to come over and confer with you at once, sir, if you will see him," said Lorimer.

"Yes, tell him I'll see him now—now—immediately."

Instead of going, Lorimer moved away a few steps, and then waited in hesitation. The Resident did not at first notice the fact, and walked up and down the lawn with bowed head and hands behind his back, deep in painful cogitation. Taking a wider turn, he came suddenly to a standstill face to face with his assistant.

"What is it? more bad news, I suppose. It never rains but it pours now. Come, out with it," he ordered, with snappish irritation in voice and manner.

"I am sorry, sir," said Lorimer, faltering, "but I must tell you that whilst attention was fixed on the execution, Fazl Ali managed to—leave the jail."

"Leave the jail! How? No euphemisms, please."

"He appears to have drugged a warder who brought him water to his cell, or in some way to have disabled him, and then, changing clothes with the man, to have walked out by the entrance gate."

"Collusion, of course. Fazl Ali had friends everywhere, and, I suppose, bribed freely."

"I have only just received the report," Lorimer continued, "and am about to go to the jail to investigate the matter."

"Very well," returned Colonel Fitzhugh. "I attach little importance to his escape, but when we next catch him, I'll see to his security myself."

Chapter XXI

"THIS WAY LIES MADNESS"

LORIMER, pleased and surprised that his chief had taken the news so calmly, now hurried away to deliver his message to the General, and then go on to the jail. A few minutes later Sir Atwell and Colonel Fitzhugh were pacing the lawn, discussing the steps to be taken in consequence of the disaster at Maizar.

"With Asiatics," commented the General, on some remark which had fallen from the Resident, "successful treachery is the whole art of war, and poor Renny should have known it."

"Doubtless," admitted Colonel Fitzhugh; "but it is equally the fact that each man has to buy his own experience."

"I did not," asserted Sir Atwell; "I profited by the teachings of history, and have never been taken in by a native, eh?"

"You are an exceptional character," dropped from the Resident.

Whether the remark was meant in sincerity or sarcasm, the General took it as a compliment, and continued, by way of palliating Colonel Renny's

mistake, "The English character is naturally unsuspicious, and not alert against foul play."

"Let us drop moralizing; no use discussing why the milk was spilt yet," broke in Colonel Fitzhugh abruptly. "What we have to do is to give those devils a lasting lesson, and that at once."

"We cannot do it without more troops. We shall want 20,000 men, eh?"

"That means inaction for a month or more," objected Colonel Fitzhugh, "and a blaze of fanaticism from Gilgit to Quetta."

"I disapprove of raids into the hills with small bodies of troops; I prefer expeditions in force," returned General Pottinger with conviction.

"Which means," interpolated the Resident, "no fighting, no punishment, lengthy despatches, a long list of honours, a big bill, and the whole thing to be done over again two or three years afterwards."

"Well, what would you do?" asked his friend.

"Immediately reinforce the detachment at Sher-auna with as many men as you can spare," the Resident answered, "and further, I should give some officer whom you can trust *carte blanche* to act as may be advisable."

"I can spare," said the General, after considering his resources, "200 rifles and 100 sabres, not more; and I might trust a good officer—you, for instance—provided he engaged that not a man should pass the night over the frontier."

"Agreed," cried Colonel Fitzhugh with alacrity. "The force is enough to protect that end of the valley at least, and I may catch or shoot a Mullah or two."

"Very good; the reinforcement will march to-night," the General promised.

"I shall also strengthen the other outposts, and inform Government that in my opinion a punitive force of not fewer than six Brigades will be necessary."

The two friends parted, mutually satisfied with the result of their conference. Sir Atwell felt he had safeguarded himself against the possibility of rash action in the Sherauna direction, and that by getting rid for a time of the dominating personality of Colonel Fitzhugh, he would be free to bring his influence to bear on Government in favour of the necessity of a hill campaign on a large scale.

On the way back to his bungalow General Pottinger chuckled over the ease with which he, the old campaigner, had got the better of the political. "Fitzhugh failed to see," he said to himself, "how completely I have tied his hands by the condition that not a man shall pass the night outside British territory. All he can do is to patrol the border. Those hill people—I know their tactics—will move up to their higher mountains and await me there. Small marauding parties will, no doubt, attempt to surprise some of our outlying villages; he can catch such cattle thieves, if he can."

Colonel Fitzhugh felt differently; there was

neither elation nor a discounting of the future with him. He would be actively employed for a few days, and get away from himself and the personal anxieties which seemed at times to be threatening his reason. He would be only thirty or forty miles from the Residency—his lately happy home, now a house of woe, soon to be further darkened, he expected, into a house of mourning. He could return there at any time in a few hours. He might with luck be able to strike a decisive blow at once, and so overawe uncommitted sections of the tribes into neutrality or perhaps abject submission. He had no desire for an expedition now. Were Dolly to die his interest in life would cease ; in that case, as soon as the frontier was pacified, he would take furlough, and devote himself to his poor, distracted wife. He felt that he hated Mankiala ; it was no place for English ladies. How mean and paltry were all his ambitions when weighed against his domestic calamities !

" But Dolly shall not die !" he cried out defiantly, his fist clenched, as if he were challenging the Deity. " God will not be so cruel as that, and Mary will recover in a day or two, and all will yet be well."

Thus, before he re-entered his house, his natural buoyancy was reasserting itself, and his mind had temporarily, at least, almost recovered its balance. Habit caused him to turn aside into his office-room and glance at the table, on which official letters and telegrams were always laid, both he and

Mary objecting to be pursued by orderlies into drawing or dining-room.

An urgent State telegram was lying on his desk, brought probably during his conference with General Pottinger. He opened it hastily, a foreboding of more ill news taking possession of him. It was from the Foreign Secretary, as follows :—

"No. 299. Please stay all further action against Fazl Ali pending the arrival of a special officer, who has been deputed by the Government of India to proceed at once to Mankiala and conduct an exhaustive inquiry into all their news-writer's reports, and the circumstances out of which his arrest and incarceration on your extraordinary charges against him arose. Treat this as urgent, and wire compliance."

He read this remarkable order through to the end, but a surging of blood to his head and a singing in his ears made the last two lines dance and grow dim before his eyes. He sat down to recover himself. The change of position seemed to increase his distress. He rose and threw open window and outer door. The fresh, cool air blew in upon his heated brow, revived him, and steadied his nerves. Standing beside the window, he slowly re-read the telegram, and though some of the words appeared blurred and faint, he gathered their meaning.

"It's an insult," he muttered ; "I am doubted. They are practically putting me on my trial, and treating that intriguing scoundrel as if he were my innocent victim. They will believe his story

about the accounts and the cheques, and God knows, not I, what he has done with the permanent advance. I am ruined ; and when Mary recovers her reason she will know all, and may believe me a dishonourable man. It would kill her, such an awakening. Better she should sleep and never wake than that. And Fazl Ali, how he will triumph—‘Mr. Yellow-Face’—ho ! ho ! ho !—as old Pottinger calls him. But, no, did not Lorimer say he had escaped from jail, as he feared I’d hang him for abetment of Dolly’s murder ? His escape has saved me, and this precious ‘special officer’—some old fossil of a judge, no doubt—will arrive to find his occupation gone. Ha ! ha ! ha !”

He had now worked himself up to a pitch of noisy excitement, and was taking quick strides to and fro in his room, rubbing his hands together, talking aloud to himself, and laughing or swearing as the ebb and flow of his emotions influenced him. In the midst of this outbreak the passage door was opened, and Dolly’s nurse, quiet but resolute Sister Dora, came in, shutting the door hurriedly behind her to prevent the sounds reaching the patient.

The black-robed sister, with her white cap and pale, calm, pitying face, stood before the lunatic—he was almost that—and with forefinger to lips, said, “Hush, Colonel Fitzhugh ; Miss Carew can hear you.”

“My God ! yes ; what a madman I am !” he whispered to her, sobered in an instant, and full of self-torture at his unpardonable forgetfulness.

"Thank you; but please endeavour to speak softly and permit no sound in the house," said the sister, with her hand on the door-latch.

"Wait, wait; how is she? I have not heard for an hour or more," he demanded almost fiercely.

"Not quite so well. Her temperature has gone up. I have sent for Dr. Jones to come at once."

"My God! my God! oh, do not forsake me! My sin is greater than I can bear," he cried in agony.

"Hush, Colonel Fitzhugh; if she is not to die you must restrain yourself," urged the sister, with low-voiced reproof.

"You will save her, will you not? You must save—you shall save her!" he added, seizing her arm.

"I am doing my best, but we are in God's hands. Let me go. I must return to her," she exclaimed, half frightened, convinced that he was out of his mind.

"Yes, go; you will save her in spite of God," he whispered hoarsely, as he opened the door and almost pushed her out.

Then the distracted man threw himself on his knees and implored the God, whose power and goodness he had just been flouting, to save his darling or let him die too. He seemed to imagine himself in God's presence, and prayed to and argued with the Deity as if He were a Being to be influenced by words or prayers.

After a time the sound of bugles caught his ears. He rose to his feet and looked at his watch.

It was nine o'clock, and, dark and threatening though the night was, there was a fitful moonlight. The reinforcements were starting, that is what the bugles announced.

He unlocked his cabinet, took out the bottle of brandy, and drank all that remained. The stimulant helped to steady him.

"I must see them before I go," he muttered to himself; "it may be my last farewell to both. But if God is good I shall return a few days hence, and find them better. To remain here just now means madness ; it is action—action—I want—and revenge ! "

Chapter XXII

“INFINITE WRATH AND INFINITE DESPAIR.”

TO Colonel Fitzhugh's confused senses, his resolve to see the two women he loved partook of the nature of a perilous adventure, almost of a crime. Both doctor and nurse had absolutely forbidden his entering Dolly's sick-room, warning him that the slightest emotion might kill her; and as for Mary, Dr. Jones had an hour before advised him only to see her when she sent for him. His presence tended to excite her, and remind her of the tragedy which had for the time unhinged her reason. His determination to look upon them both once more before he started for Sherauna was irresistible.

Like a night-thief, he noiselessly opened his door, peered outwards to see that no one was watching him, and then stole down the passage to Dolly's door. Putting his ear to the keyhole, he listened. All was still in the room except for a slight sound like the crinkling of paper, as when the page of a book is turned. “The nurse is

reading," he thought; "her face will be towards the bed, her back to the door." Inch by inch he opened it wide enough to admit himself.

He stood inside and gazed fearfully where Dolly lay, but the vigilant ear of the sleepless sister had heard the unauthorized sounds. She turned her head towards him and frowned displeasure, at the same time motioning to him to go. He implored her with his eyes, and she pointed to his boot-clad feet. He nodded comprehension, and in dumb show caused her to understand that he wished the position of the lamp altered in order that he might see the patient better. Moved to pity, Sister Dora shifted the light so that it shone upon the bed from behind the patient's head.

Dolly was lying on her back, her hands crossed upon the coverlet, and her eyes closed. But for the slight glow of fever on her cheeks and lips, and the visible tremor or rise and fall of her night-dress over her chest, she looked—as she must have often done when lying on that little bed—an ideally lovely girl asleep. Rooted to the spot, not daring to move, he regarded her in silent devotion for a minute or two, whilst tears stole down his cheeks and his lips moved in prayer.

Sister Dora was indulgent to the miserable man, but the light was too strong for her patient, so she held up a warning hand to him, meaning that he should go. As she did so, Dolly opened her eyes, saw him, he thought, and gave him a look of loving recognition. In alarm Sister Dora rose from her seat, intending to force him to leave, but

before she had taken a step he had gone, and had noiselessly closed the door behind him.

Again outside, he waited a little to compose himself, and then went down the cross-passage to his wife's side of the house. On the way he passed Dolly's Ayah, who was returning from the enjoyment of a few draws at the hubble-bubble to her post of duty outside the door of the sick-room.

He entered his wife's room with confidence. From outside he had heard her voice in conversation with Margaret, his boy's nurse. Alan was by now well launched on his twelve hours of wakeless sleep, the recuperation he nightly took to fit himself for his daily round of ceaseless activity. Mary welcomed her husband with an affectionate smile, and told him that she felt better.

"I am so glad, dear; in a few days' time you will be quite yourself," he said, with a successful attempt to be cheerful.

"Baby has been such an angel to-night, George," she informed him. "When Nanna came a short time ago to take him away to bed, he did not cry a bit; and before he left me he repeated his little prayer, ending, 'God bless daddy!'"

"He's a good boy, is he not, Margaret?" said his father.

"Never a better, sir; and he's the fifth I've brought up since I first went out as nurse."

"You can go now, Margaret, as Colonel Fitzhugh has come," interposed Mary.

"You won't want me again, ma'am?"

"The Colonel will stop," Mary explained, "until the doctor comes and gives me morphia."

When she had gone, George sat down beside his wife, and talked as long as he could of the perfections of the infant prodigy whom both worshipped. When that subject was exhausted, George tried to cautiously inform her of his impending departure.

"But why should you go into camp to-night? and why should you not wait till I am well again?" she asked, vexed with him for what appeared his usual preference for duty to his wife.

"Did you not hear the bugles, about an hour ago? I am going out with the troops."

"It's night-time, and troops do not march at night unless"—and she watched him suspiciously—"in cases of great emergency"

"This is one, dear," he said gravely.

"Ah! you are holding back something from me. What has happened? I am not a child, to be kept in the dark about things."

The concluding words were uttered petulantly. He feared her growing excitement would increase unless he gave her some reasonable explanation for this sudden movement of troops.

"There has been a disturbance at Sherauna," he said, "and some of our officers and men have been cut up."

"And you are going out to fight? Oh, George, how can I let you go!" she cried, clinging to him with a fondness which surprised him.

"I'll come back in a day or two, dear," he said gently ; "Sherauna is only thirty miles away."

"But they may kill you," she wailed ; and then, giving way to her apprehensions, she continued : "How I hate this frontier life ! with these savages all round us, and no certainty to-day what will happen to-morrow. By to-morrow you may be brought back to me on a stretcher dead—dead as poor Dolly is."

He started at the mention of the name. Had the gap in her memory been fully repaired, or was it only a partial and obscure presentation of facts which she perceived ?

"Dolly is alive, dear, but very ill," he said, in a low voice.

"Why do you try to deceive me? Her spirit comes often to me, but it will not tell me how it parted from the body. How was it? I puzzle over it so."

"Hush! dear; you will know all when you are better," he said, feeling helpless.

"Know all when I am better!" she repeated, her face clouding ; "no, tell me now—now—I insist."

"Dolly was hit by some thief, darling. Don't you remember?" he explained, in desperation.

"Yes," she whispered, the key given unlocking her memory, "it comes to me now: the evil face against the window, the gun thrust through; breaking the glass, the explosion, and then a cry from Dolly. After that it is all darkness—I suppose I fainted—what happened then?"

"Well, dear, the shot wounded our Dolly," he explained, finishing the story for her.

"And the room became red—all red, I remember," she proceeded, in an awed voice, whilst she clung to him again.

Suddenly, under some new trick of her imaginings, she withdrew her arms from his neck, and looking curiously at his hands, said, "They are white and clean—there is no blood upon them." Then she turned to him suspiciously and insisted, "You have washed the stains off, that is the reason."

"What pretty hands you have, darling!" he insinuated, with a feeble attempt to divert her thoughts, as he took one in his and caressed it.

She snatched it away, and wandering off to another subject, asked him, with a look of cunning on her face, "Your hands are clean now, but were they so when you wrote those cheques?"

He heard the dreaded words, and a feeling of consternation seized him. Was it a random guess, or did she know? and if so, how much? She saw his terror, and it pleased her. Leaning over towards him, she asked, "Where are my diamonds?" and, without waiting for an answer, continued, nodding at him with a smile of superior wisdom, "I know, but you don't."

"What do you mean, Mary? Have you parted with your diamonds to pay my debts?" he inquired, a new light breaking on him.

"Debts—what debts?" she inquired, staring at him in puzzled vacuity.

"Never mind," he replied wearily. "I must be going now. Do you remember what I said?"

"Yes; you are going to get killed, and be brought back under a bloody sheet. Dolly dead, you dead—all dead."

She uttered these words rapidly, under an access of excitement, and then hearing the door-handle turned, she saw an apparition in black enter the room, and stand in its worst-lighted part near the door. It was Sister Dora. Mary gazed in amazement—for she had not consciously seen the sister before—and pointing to the figure, whispered, "There, I told you, that is Dolly's spirit. How sad and pale it looks! and see, it is in mourning. The white about the head shows she died young."

Without advancing, Sister Dora said quietly to Colonel Fitzhugh, "The doctor is with her now, and thinks you should be at hand, in case she asks for you."

Mary heard the words, and realized her husband's anguish, and intention to desert her. He was now moving towards the door. She rose from the bed to stop him, and, staggering from weakness, held out her hands to him, shrieking imploringly, "Don't go! stay with me!" but he heeded her not, and went.

With a cry of despair she fell back on the bed. She had fainted.

Sister Dora had been a passive witness of the latter part of this scene. Dedicated to the service of God from girlhood, and spending her life in the alleviation of human suffering, she was

accustomed to witness outbursts of passion and pathos. The agony of physical pain she realized ; the emotions of love and jealousy she hardly comprehended ; she had never felt either herself. How then could she fully sympathise with the feelings which influenced husband and wife in the struggle enacted before her ? In her heart she condemned the wife, for her patient's necessity was supreme, whereas Mrs. Fitzhugh was only suffering from temporary hysteria. However, as both Doctor Atherby-Jones and Colonel Fitzhugh were now with the dying girl, she stayed and ministered to the wants of the fainting wife lying there on the bed before her. Under her skilful manipulation consciousness returned in a few minutes, and with it came a sweet but helpless reasonableness which appealed to Sister Dora's heart.

"Is Dolly dying ?" was Mary's whispered inquiry.

"I hope not," she replied ; "but as Miss Carew appeared to be sinking, and kept watching the door expectingly, the doctor thought that I had better summon Colonel Fitzhugh."

"George was right to go to her," Mary announced : "for the moment I was angry, jealous perhaps ; but I was wrong."

"It was the least he could do, as Miss Carew offered her life to save his," the Sister remarked, with a tinge of asperity.

Just then the subject of their conversation returned, looking worn and distraught. He told Sister Dora to go back to her patient, and sat down by Mary's bedside.

"Is she better?" his wife asked.

He shook his head, and turned away to conceal his tears.

"Poor George!" said Mary, trying to be his comforter. "I am so sorry, but God will yet be gracious and restore her to us."

"If He is just He will; but the age of miracles is past," was his despairing rejoinder.

"Will you hold my hand, dear?" Mary asked of him; "and please don't mind what I say. I am in pain again, and feel quite light-headed."

He took her hand in his. It was hot and feverish, and the pulse was quick and jerky. He placed his palm on her forehead, and felt her temples throbbing.

"You have overdone yourself, Mary, and seem to be in high fever," he suggested to her.

"I don't think it is fever. I am overwrought, and something in my head seems bursting," Mary explained, not very clearly.

"Mine is on fire, too," he answered. "It is maddening, this suspense. If she dies, I could curse God, and die too."

"And leave me and Alan? Oh, George!" Mary complained.

"Darling, you know what I mean. I cannot bear to think of Dolly dying in my place."

"I love her too. I pray she may live."

"And I too," he said simply.

After that they remained together in silence for some time, until he heard Mary saying to herself "I am tired, so tired, and my head is splitting. I

wonder if Doctor Jones will come soon and give me morphia."

He raised his head at the word "morphia" and said, "The doctor told me if you asked for it to inject it myself. I know how it is done. Must you have it, Mary?"

"Yes, I must, for I cannot sleep without it; and the pain in my head is terrible."

"All right. Where do you keep it?"

She told him, and he took the injector and the phial and examined them.

"How many drops, dear?" he asked.

"Six, I think," she answered uncertainly; "but you cannot go wrong, as you fill the syringe to the second mark."

Moving to the lamp,—which was placed on the mantel-piece, so as to be invisible from the bed—he charged the reservoir to what he thought was the second mark, but his hand was shaking, and his eyes were blinded by his tears. He thought of his desolate house, for he had given up hope for Dolly. The doctor had told him she appeared to be sinking fast, though it was still possible she might rally. She had not recognised him, though he had bent over her and whispered her name. Dolly gone, what had he to live for? His wife and child? Yes, perhaps; but when Mary recovered, she would spurn him, she would be told of his disgrace, and think him guilty, for this special officer who was coming would see his accounts, and they would show that the deficit in the permanent advance

agreed with his over-drafts. Who would believe that he, the sagacious political, had been as wax in the hands of his Munshi ?

All this went through his mind, and a great despair came over him. If he survived the revenge he intended to take on those who had perpetrated the Maizar outrage, and caught and secured Fazl Ali—and he grinned darkly at the euphemism of the term “secured”—his work would be accomplished, he would then die, and so escape dishonour.

“And,” suggested his evil familiar within him, “what passing more easy than the euthanasia of a painless oblivion? The means are there in that phial—a few drops—a little prick—a little pressure, and it is done, and then oblivion—rest.”

He looked longingly at phial and syringe, and said to himself, he would carry both away with him, and should he survive the fight, they would be his friends and comforters. He would do it—ha! ha! ha! he laughed softly to himself, revelling in the contemplation of his own extinction.

“George,” came his wife’s voice from the bed, “can’t you manage it? The agony I am in is intolerable. Do be quick, and give me peace.”

He started. He had been thinking of himself, and not of her sufferings and her instructions. “Give her peace; she wants it more than you do,” whispered his familiar in his ear. The idea pleased him; why should she too not have peace—eternal peace? And then after a few days they would meet beyond the grave—perhaps—and, anyway, their earthly troubles would be over.

"Do be quick," urged the pain-filled voice from the bed.

"Yes, dear," he answered, and forgetting he had half-filled the syringe, he re-charged it as well as his shaking hands and beaded eyes permitted. Then screwing in the needle, he went to the bedside. His mind was in a whirl, his eyes were gleaming with overwhelming excitement, and his hands trembling.

Mary's eyes were shut; her pinched features and the throbbing veins on the temples showed how acute was her suffering.

"Here you are, dear; hold out your arm," he said, in an unsteady voice.

She thrust her bared arm towards him, and he kissed the blue veins of the inner part of the forearm near the elbow; then he pinched up the flesh between his forefingers and inserted the needle; then, holding the place together, injected the morphia with his other hand.

The relief was instantaneous: Mary's drawn features relaxed, a restful smile overspread her face, her eyes opened and dwelt on him gratefully.

"Thank you, George; I never knew it act so quickly before," she said, in dreamy ease.

He bent and kissed her.

"Are you sure you dropped it all right?" she asked, thinking she might have been given an over-dose.

"Yes, of course; but my hand shook. It may be a drop or two too little—or too much." He added

the last three words in a faltering voice, as he had suddenly remembered he had twice charged the reservoir of the syringe.

"It will be all right, I am sure," Mary said, too sleepy to think. "Kiss me again, and go, but lower the light first."

He stooped over her, and let his lips touch hers. She put her arms round his neck, and said, "Dear, dear George, you are a good husband to me; I do love you—next to baby. May God bless you."

These were her last words. She was in the *nirvana* of oblivion almost before she had blessed him.

With unsteady hands he turned the lamp down, moved noiselessly from the room, crept along the passage, past Dolly's Ayah boozing outside her door, opened the front-door, and almost without drawing breath stood in the verandah—a haunted, terror-stricken man. Even there he was not safe; he heard the evil one in him laughing in cynical delight over his blundering, or too late repentance; he heard strange noises, like gusts of sobbing, outside him, and was moving away when a hand touched his arm, and he saw his old bearer, Jiwan, beside him.

The man was blubbering from a breaking heart, for he loved the Missy *Sahib* and the Lady *Sahib*, and their deaths were to him the end of all things. He handed helmet, sword, and revolver to his master, who mechanically took them and rushed out into the night, feeling in his despair, like Satan

thrust from heaven, when he cried, " Which way I flee is hell—myself am hell."

* * * *

Yes, go forth into the night, weak, sinful man, a few days ago lusty with health and good living, now crushed with the torture of the consciousness that from cowardice you have killed the trusting girl who wedded you in her innocence, glamoured by your big person, your handsome face, and conquering-hero manner.

You killed her, forsooth, because you loved her so, to spare her gentle guilelessness the shock of believing you a dishonoured man ; or did you kill her in the forgetfulness of mad emotion ? No, you killed her, dastard, from the craven selfishness of the fear that had she discovered your weakness she would have cursed instead of blessing you.

Go forth into the night, wretched man. Will its blackness hide your iniquities, think you ? No ; the myriad stars of the firmament look down on you, and proclaim you madman, poltroon, and murderer ; and yet the pity of it, your victim died loving you, blessing you, and knowing all.

And the other one ? the bright, loving little Dolly, who missed, through a wayward word, wisely happiness—a fond husband's caresses, the abiding heaven of maternity—she, whom your animalism sought to ruin, to damn body and soul —she, too, knowing all, pitied you, loved you, and sacrificed her sweet young life for your worthless self.

* * * *

Oh, miserable man! lower than a beast of the field, yet more fortunate than the angels of heaven, who know not the height and the depth of woman's love, by what right hast thou, unworthy, been loved through good repute and evil repute by two such noble women?

Right? There is no right in woman's love—it is a mystery passing comprehension.

Go forth, go forth into the night, George Fitz-hugh Atone by a noble death, if thou darest, for thy weak and sinful life. Do that, and the God whom thou didst curse and distrust will be merciful, and thou shalt again meet these two sacrificed ones—the sweet saint-wife and the innocent-wicked little Dolly.

Chapter XXIII

THE TONIC OF ACTION

WHEN Colonel Fitzhugh rushed in mad despair out of his house, he wandered for a time about the grounds, unable to collect his thoughts. He had a confused conviction that wife and cousin were dead, and that he, too, had to die. Yes, but why and when? Had he not undertaken some dangerous enterprise; and if so, what was it? Were his head not so hot he might think; but it was an aching, buzzing fireball—one huge pulsation. He put up his hand and found that he was wearing his helmet. Then he noticed he was armed and equipped for riding. He bared his head, and the cold night air blew about it, and began to cool his congested brain. The mists were lifting.

Ah, what was this in his waistcoat pocket? A little phial, a little morocco case. He opened the latter, and felt the outline of the morphia injector. All was clear as day now. He had to get out to Sherauna that night, avenge the deaths of massacred friends and faithful sepoys, and, if possible, settle a little private account of his own. If he managed to get killed—well; if he survived, it

would be equally well—and he tapped his pocket significantly. What he wanted now was the blotting out of the past; and that could only be attained by action—ceaseless action—until death should give him peace, and restore him to the loved ones gone before.

He was now standing at the entrance to the Residency grounds, considering whether or not he was self-possessed enough to meet General Pottinger. His irresolution ended when he heard the gong of that officer's guard sound the hour of eleven. He pulled himself together, and stepped out at a rapid pace, but paused and challenged as the sound of steps approaching caught his ear.

"Friend," was the answer, in an unmistakably English voice; and presently he was joined by Lorimer.

"I thought it best to come over to see if you were ready, sir," his assistant explained.

"Yes, I am on my way to General Pottinger's. My horse and the escort were to meet me there. Absolute quiet is necessary at my house."

"How are the ladies, sir? Doctor Jones, I know, is passing the night at the Residency."

"Both are sleeping peacefully by now," was the unexpected announcement.

"That is splendid news," said Lorimer, with enthusiasm. "I'll inquire in the morning, and ride out afterwards with the last bulletin. God has, after all, been good to you, sir."

Colonel Fitzhugh regarded him curiously, and envied the boy his simple faith. They walked on

in silence ; the old political busy in forecasting the next twenty-four hours for himself, the young political almost light-hearted, so relieved was he to know that the two dear ladies of the Residency were "sleeping peacefully."

Presently they entered the compound of the bungalow in which Sir Atwell Pottinger was staying.

"Ah, here we are!" said Colonel Fitzhugh, throwing some cheerfulness into his manner, "and there is Pottinger himself, wondering why the devil I am ten minutes late, no doubt."

After exchanging a few words, the General reminded his friend of the condition that not a man was to pass a night across the border.

"You already have my promise," Colonel Fitzhugh replied. "Won't you wish me luck, and a good bag all the same? I may pick up a few marauders, you know; but Mullahs are my particular fancy."

"By all means; five or six head of game, I hope. Good-bye, good luck," was the hearty response.

Before the start Lorimer asked his chief if he had any instructions.

"Yes; I don't want you to call at the house until after breakfast. No use disturbing the sleepers too early, you know. I shall not expect you at Sherauna before luncheon, but I expect"—and here he lowered his voice—"you will get news of me which may bring you out sooner."

So saying, he mounted, and, accompanied by a

Surgeon-Captain Franks, started down the road by which the detachment had marched over two hours previously.

"He is as keen as a sporting subaltern," Sir Atwell remarked to Lorimer, as the two stood talking before separating for the night.

"I wonder he went, sir, leaving Mrs. Fitzhugh and Miss Carew to the doctor and the nurses."

"Best thing he could do, my boy. They wanted quiet, and he wanted—well—exercise; and he will get that. He will be back in a few days with this superabundant energy worked off, eh?"

"Do you think he will be able to do anything, sir?" asked Lorimer, pondering over his chief's last words.

"No," replied the General, with energy; "he would have more chance of a bag if he went duck-shooting in June. Water-fowl are then in the high hills, where the Pechistanis must now be; and they will remain there until I hunt them up. I know the scoundrels, eh?"

Lorimer was not convinced, and went to bed vaguely apprehensive that there would be stirring news next day.

Meanwhile, Colonel Fitzhugh and his companion, with four troopers behind them, were speeding along the road, intent on catching up the troops. The Resident hardly spoke, though Doctor Franks overheard him muttering to himself occasionally. When about nine miles out they came upon the infantry detachment, halted by the roadside to let their baggage mules come up.

"Who is commanding?" the Resident asked.

"I, sir—Major Eastlake," said that officer, coming forward.

"Have you heard anything of some natives on ponies, who started about an hour before you did?" was the next question.

"No; but if you overtake the cavalry, they may know something."

"All right. You halt at Janikhel, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; for a few hours only."

Colonel Fitzhugh changed his horse, and the little party rode on. The moon was in its second quarter, but obscured by clouds, and would give them a fitful light for another hour or two. When eighteen miles out, Colonel Fitzhugh caught up the cavalry.

"Who are with you?" he asked of the officer commanding.

"Captain Anderson and Lieutenants Tombs and Spottiswoode," was the answer.

"I am anxious to reach Sherauna by 2 a.m. You will be some hours later, I suppose?"

"Yes; we shall get there about eight."

"If you will let me take your two youngsters on with me, I shall be obliged," continued the Resident.

"Certainly, sir."

He then asked whether anything had been seen or heard of any mounted natives on the road going Sheraunawards. After some inquiry, a trooper was put forward, who stated that whilst watering his horse at a well about half an hour before, he

had heard that three mounted travellers had rested there and then gone on.

"Did he describe them?" the Resident demanded eagerly.

"No, *Sahib*, except that they appeared tired and in a hurry."

"We are on the scent," said Colonel Fitzhugh, with evident satisfaction, as he started again. "We ought to do the last ten miles inside an hour."

They pressed on for some miles, trotting and cantering by turns, until they met an old man driving some asses in front of him. Colonel Fitzhugh accosted him, and by kind words and the promise of a rupee soon overcame his alarm at being suddenly surrounded by armed *Sahibs* on horseback.

Being asked if he had met any one he became suspicious and said, "No."

"Ah, then we are not on the track of those three thieves, after all," said the Resident, in Pashto, to no one in particular.

"Three thieves, *Sahib*; are you after them?" asked the man, with alacrity, overhearing the remark, as was intended.

"Yes, we want to shoot them. If you can tell me about them, you shall have two rupees;" and he thrust the white coins under the donkey-man's eyes.

"They are scoundrels, *Sahib*; they came upon me and carried off my *chillam* (pipe) and tobacco, and gave me a beating for payment."

"Describe them," said the Resident, giving him the rupees.

"Two were Pechistanis, I think, and the third was a little foreigner, with all his face hidden in a cloth, except his eyes."

"Which way did they go?" was the next question.

"They turned off the road up the bed of a *nullah*, which leads to the hills."

"That will do," the Resident said; and then, addressing his companions, he cried in high good-humour, "Come on, gentlemen; the scent is hot now."

"Whose scent, sir?" asked Doctor Franks, as much mystified as the other two.

"Whose? Can't you smell it?" Colonel Fitz-hugh replied, and forthwith he threw up his nose and sniffed as a pointer does when near the quarry.

Doctor Franks nudged Spottiswoode of the 1st Punjab Cavalry, and whispered to him, "Mad as a March hare. He has been talking to himself at intervals all the way, and he rides as if he wished to break his neck."

"I'll bet you a gold mohar," returned Spottiswoode, "you are wrong, and that we shall have some fun before we are a day older."

"I am not a betting man," replied the cautious doctor.

"But I am," interposed young Tombs. "Done with you, old chappie."

"All right; see if you can get some information out of him," suggested his sporting chum.

Tombs rode up to Colonel Fitzhugh, who, as usual, was leading, and said, with the innocence of a babe, "I can smell nothing, sir, though I have tried."

"Then you have no nose if you can't detect the scent of over-heated, sweating natives on tired ponies miles off."

"I'm not a bloodhound, sir."

"No; you are a puppy as yet, on your first hunt."

The boy fell back abashed, insulted, rebellious. Was he not twenty-two years of age, an officer and a gentleman of two years' service? and to be told he was a puppy! His chum, Spottiswoode, laughed, told him he deserved his snubbing, and that if he sulked, Colonel Fitzhugh might leave him behind at Sherauna, and he would lose his chance of a V.C.

"Bah! What can he do but patrol the roads? V.C.'s are not picked up that way."

"The Colonel means business and knows what to do," Spottiswoode replied; "if you don't believe me, let us raise the stake to Rs100."

"Done with you, old chappie," cried the now cheerful Tombs.

Presently they saw a light ahead of them, glimmering through the darkness, from what appeared to be a hillock, close round about which were small oval objects in two lines. The moon had set, but the night had cleared, and the feeble light from the myriad-starred firmament disclosed the fact that they were passing a succession of terraced

fields, which indicated the adjacence of a village. The small, more distant excrescences were puzzling.

"What are they?" wondered Tombs.

"The *tumuli* over Muhammedan graves, with a mosque in the middle, I expect," Spottiswoode answered readily, being a superior youth, with a reputation for knowing everything—a *sab-jāntewala*, as they call such a man in India.

"But the light; what is it?"

"Oh, that will be the Mullah's lamp. He is probably reading prayers for the dead. They do it once a week, you know. These Muhammedans believe in the communion of saints, and purgatory, and all that, just like Roman Catholics."

"What a lot you know!" Tombs remarked, in genuine admiration of his brother sub.'s learning.

Just then Colonel Fitzhugh, who was some distance ahead, riding in moody silence with Doctor Franks beside him, suddenly halted.

The little party, thus brought together in a clump, heard horses' hoofs ringing against the stones in front of them; as yet the riders were hidden by a fall in the ground.

"What is it, sir," asked Tombs of the Resident.

"A cavalry patrol, I expect," was the answer. "That is the Sherauna outpost, where the lights and tents are."

Tombs fell back to his chum, and whispered, 'What a cocksure idiot you are!"

"Shut up. How could I tell? I've never been

here before," Spottiswoode protested with vehemence.

The Resident challenged as four horsemen crested an undulation before him, and stood silhouetted as shadowy forms against the sky. The challenge was answered. The two parties met, exchanged remarks, and then rode on in a body to the small enclosure officially dignified as Sherauna Fort.

Colonel Fitzhugh lost no time in collecting all available information as to the movements and plans of the hill-men, who had declared war, as usual, by an act of treachery. The details of their cowardly outrage would keep. For the present his business was to avenge the deaths of his comrades, both English officers and sepoys. The only chance of accomplishing this was by surprising them at once, before the arrival of the reinforcements, now on the march, should put them on the alert. They knew that the Sherauna Fort was held by about 250 men, of whom upwards of thirty were wounded, and supposed that the garrison could not be strengthened until late in the following day. They would, therefore, believe themselves secure against the possibility of reprisals for twenty-four hours at least.

If, as was probable, the three mounted natives whose spoor had been discovered along the road, were Fazl Ali and two of his friends or dependents, their arrival at Maizar would lull the enemy into a belief in their temporary security. Fazl Ali had escaped from jail about sundown, before the news of the Maizar massacre was known through-

out the station, and he had started well ahead of the troops, possibly before the order for the despatch of reinforcements had issued, and certainly before it was talked about in the bazaar.

Thus, if the enemy assumed the offensive—which was unlikely—they would attack Sherauna that night, before dawn, or not at all. If, as was most probable, they were still undecided about their next movements, and occupied in dividing the spoil and sending the fiery cross round amongst their neighbours, the chances were that they were then sitting in *jirga* at the place known as the “Council Rock,” some four miles beyond the frontier and not more than seven from Sherauna itself.

Fazl Ali would be with them, and was sufficiently cognizant of Government methods to be able to assure them that the Sarkar’s practice was to ponder long and move slowly, and if a punitive expedition were decided on, to send a fully equipped army, wearing boots and shoes, and accompanied by many thousands of transport animals. This army would leisurely attempt to hunt down the nimble, sandal-shod mountaineers, whose whole destructible property was of less value than one day’s rations for a regiment.

Colonel Fitzhugh’s plan of operation was based on the above assumptions : he would lead a chosen band to the “Council Rock,” and, if in luck, surprise the enemy, and kill or capture Mullah Powindah and Fazl Ali.

He now appeared a calm, determined soldier,

whose whole mind was concentrated on the enterprise in hand. He looked forward to a few hours of glorious life, bourned by what might happen in the fight or immediately afterwards on his return to the fort. Doubtless his thoughts did momentarily wander to the chambers of death in the Residency, but his resolution was strong enough to shut out the past sufficiently to prevent it interfering with the full employment of his faculties on the work of the hour. Young Lee was the only British officer at Sherauna who had escaped unhurt in the massacre at Maizar. Of the military officers, five had been killed, or had, since the act of treachery, died, and the other two—of whom one was a doctor—were enough for garrison duty. Colonel Fitzhugh expected that, whether fully successful or not, he would be back by 9 or 10 a.m.; so he decided to leave the fort in the charge of the above two officers, and to take with him the three companions of his ride out, as well as young Lee.

His force consisted of 150 sepoy's, all Sikhs, under a Subadar named Sher Singh. The start was fixed for 3 a.m., so that the objective might be reached shortly before daybreak. Every available mule, pony, and stretcher was to follow as soon as possible to a spot named, just beyond the frontier.

Preparations completed, the force marched. For the first three miles the country was open and uninhabited, hence no special precautions were required. Now was the time to hear about

the Maizar affair, so Colonel Fitzhugh invited young Lee to ride with him and give an account of it.

"Well, sir," said the boy, "they were so friendly and hospitable that we trusted them. Colonel Renny marched his men into a trap, and whilst we were smoking and resting, the villagers suddenly shot us down, picking off the officers first."

"What induced him to bivouac in a hollow under the walls and towers of possibly hostile hamlets, all, as he knew, full of armed men?"

"He thought they were friendly," the boy answered. "They told him there was no other open and shaded ground but the village common, and that they had collected firewood, goats and milk for our men there. Why, my native assistant was himself deceived."

"Gul Muhammad? I know him—a lazy, stupid, conceited ass, if no worse. His business was to use his eyes and ears and know what the hill-people were thinking and doing," said Colonel Fitzhugh indignantly; "if he was deceived he should be dismissed from the service. I am told his life was spared, like yours."

The boy hung his head, and admitted they had all been fools to be over-reached so easily.

"You are beginning your service, and have bought your experience early; but as for poor Renny—" said Colonel Fitzhugh, sighing.

He did not finish the sentence, for he was thinking, with pity, of Colonel Renny's widow and young children; and how he had so uselessly

thrown away his own life, and those of others, by an act of misplaced confidence, creditable to him had he been merely an unsuspecting globe-trotter, but incexcusable in a soldier with twenty-five years' frontier service.

"You don't blame me, sir?" Lee asked, feeling the reproach of the Resident's prolonged silence.

"No, I blame no one. Unsuspiciousness is a fine trait in the English character. Besides, you knew nothing of the cunning of these Pechistanis," Colonel Fitzhugh replied. "In point of fact, I think that you, the Subadar Sher Singh, and all concerned, showed the greatest coolness and courage in effecting your retreat from the death-trap with such small losses."

"We brought back Colonel Renny's body," said the boy proudly, "and all the wounded and the two guns as well, and we killed more of them than they did of us."

"The retreat was soldierly, a fine achievement," the Resident observed; "but all before was—well *—de mortuis.*"

They had now reached the entrance to the defile—the stony bed of a hill torrent—two miles up which lay the little glen, the objective of the expedition.

It was about 4.30 a.m., nearly two hours before dawn. The locality was an admirable one for defence, should the attacking party have to withdraw rapidly. Colonel Fitzhugh halted his men, and sent out scouts to right and left, and a picket to the top of a line of low cliffs, which ran parallel

with the windings of the torrent-bed for a long mile.

Subadar Sher Singh then picked out fifty men who were to compose the "forlorn hope." More were not taken because success depended on the noiselessness of the approach upon the enemy, until the moment for the final rush should arrive.

To move at night with certainty and celerity amongst boulders is difficult at any time ; but if, in addition, it is essential that the advance should be as silent as that of hill-men when stealing up to surprise a sleeping camp, there is only one way of attaining the end in view. The men must be young and active, cragsmen if possible, but in any case boot and shoe must be discarded for the grass or soft leather sandal. Now a small number of the men of the 3rd Sikhs were *shikaris*, whilst a large percentage, from motives of economy, and also from a wish to please their officers, most of whom were sportsmen, were in the habit of wearing sandals when on outpost duty. Thus, every man who was to accompany Colonel Fitzhugh up that stony *nullah* was sandal-shod, as were he himself and young Tombs. The latter had been taken as he was the best athlete and mountaineer in his regiment.

In addition to seeing to their feet, Colonel Fitzhugh caused the men to tie their turbans on with strips of cotton cloth under their chins, and to substitute for knickers and gaiters simple loin-cloths. By these means their heads would be better

protected against sword-cuts and their movements would be freer.

Lieutenant Spottiswoode was left in charge of the main body, with instructions to hold the mouth of the defile and cover the withdrawal by crowning the cliffs on one or both sides, and pushing up as near the head of the *nullah* as the ground would allow.

"What are my orders, sir?" inquired young Lee, who was hanging about, uncertain whether he was to advance or remain.

"You will stay and help Spottiswoode," said the Resident. "I dare not risk your life a second time in twenty-four hours; and by staying you may be of immense use if we have to run for it."

The boy took the order sorrowfully. He was as keen as the disappointed Spottiswoode to see the fun and avenge his slaughtered friends.

When all was ready a tot of commissariat rum was served out to each Sikh, including their Subadar, the "lion," which his name, Sher Singh, meant.

"I'm in luck," said Tombs to Spottiswoode, whilst fastening on his grass sandals.

"I am not, but I'll win my bet," returned Spottiswoode gloomily.

"Never mind, old chap; but shoot straight when we are returning and being followed up," said his chum.

"Running away, you mean, with a thousand mad devils after you," suggested Spottiswoode sarcastically, by way of encouragement.

Whilst they were talking a nimble-footed scout, who had been sent up the cliffs on the right of the defile, returned and reported that he had seen the glow of a great fire in the direction of the basin in which the Council Rock was situated.

"If you are right you shall have a shot-gun as a present from me when we get back," said Colonel Fitzhugh, feeling almost sure of his prey now.

"Come, Subadar," he added, "we must be moving. Remember, no talking, not a sound, or our vengeance will be incomplete."

"Good luck and a V.C. to you," said Spottiswoode, as he gave Tombs a hand-grip.

"I wish you were coming too; awful hard lines on you," returned Tombs.

Colonel Fitzhugh overheard the remark, and calling Spottiswoode, told him that the enemy, as soon as they recovered from their surprise, would be certain to follow in overwhelming numbers, in which case the fate of the expedition would depend on his coolness and the ability with which he should handle his men.

"All right sir, you may trust me," was Spottiswoode's confident promise.

Chapter XXIV

THE ASSEMBLING OF PARLIAMENT

THE grey-heads of Maizar wondered at Colonel Renny's simplicity when he so confidently marched his men into the trap prepared for them. The time chosen for the excursion was as incomprehensibly foolish as the action taken. It was the last day of the Moharram, when Mullahs are bitterest against infidels, and Musalmans generally, whether Shias or Sunnis, are maddest against the enemies of Islâm.

At such a time did Colonel Renny bivouac with his infidel Sikhs right under the walls and loop-holed towers of Maizar. Well might the congregated Mullahs cry, "Allah has delivered these dogs of *Sahibs* and these sons of burnt fathers, the Sikh sepoys, into the hands of the faithful." It was true, and every peasant loaded and primed his ancestral matchlock, and many a bead was laid on the infatuated Colonel Renny and his officers whilst they ate, drank, and smoked.

The difficulty amongst the fighting leaders in the plot, Sadda Khan and Alamb Khan, and the spiritual wire-puller, their famous Mullah Powindah, was to restrain their compatriots until a sufficient number of clansmen from neighbouring villages could be secretly collected and placed in ambush, ready to fall on the helpless sepoys as soon as their British officers had been shot down.

The latter had finished their tiffin, and were looking on in lazy enjoyment at a village dance, whilst two regimental pipers of the 1st Punjab Infantry—a small detachment of which gallant corps was present—were strutting up and down blowing that favourite Pathan air, "*Zakhmi pa gham khe*" ("Wounded in sorrow"), when a green flag was suddenly waved from the nearest tower in Maizar. At the signal the dancers fled towards the village gate, and the marksmen stationed in the towers and behind the walls, overlooking what was soon to be a slaughter-yard, began to pick off the hitherto unsuspecting *Sahibs*. Colonel Renny and two others fell at the first discharge, and then 500 matchlocks belched bullets, slugs, and even pebbles, from every bush and wall all round that fatal village green.

When all the *Sahibs* were dead or wounded except Lee, the new political, whose ignorance and pretty girlish face had won him protection, the sepoys and their native officers, much to the disgust of the Maizarwâls, did not abandon guns and rifles and run away, as the bravest Pathans

would have done. On the contrary, they coolly loaded and reloaded the two mountain guns, and discharged them several times into the thickest of the cowardly swarms of fanatics who were trying to muster up courage to charge and capture the guns. The action of our sepoy gunners thus gave time to some of the surviving native officers to begin the collection of the dead and wounded, and carry out a rapid retirement to a less indefensible position. The surprised but still organised troops retreated up a narrow track to the nearest ridge, fighting all the way, and killing scores of their "Allah ! Allah !" shouting assailants. The further retreat was conducted much in the same orderly way.

As the noise of battle moved eastwards, and proclaimed the news of the defeat of the unbelievers, the enemy kept increasing in numbers. Every hamlet poured out a contingent to the holy war. But 250 unwounded sepoys, resolutely defending each ridge and working back in successive lines, are, in daylight, so long as ammunition lasts, a match for indefinite swarms of hill savages, whose firelocks spit feeble pellets a hundred yards or so.

Thus, with a loss of fifty-four killed and wounded, the entrapped sepoys, ably led by young Lee and the lion-like Sher Singh, got back into British territory.

When the pursuit ended, and the leading conspirators counted up the cost, their satisfaction was small—they had lost heavily; they had ex-

pected to annihilate the whole force, but five-sixths had escaped, carrying with them their dead and wounded, and, what was more disappointing, their rifles as well. Sadda Khan was gloomy, his personal enemies jubilant; the Mullah was unapproachable, entreating God continually in prayer within the seclusion of his private mosque, and so for the time he escaped reproaches.

However something had to be done. The first business was to bury the dead, the next to divide the meagre spoil, and invite their neighbours to an immediate conference. A few fire-eaters contended they ought to attack and carry Sherauna before its garrison could be reinforced; but the clansmen thought otherwise, arguing, with unanswerable logic, that if a handful of sepoyes could hold 1,000 hill-men at bay whilst retreating over three miles of bad ground, what could 5,000 hill-men do against a walled enclosure defended with guns as Sherauna Fort was?

So the Maizarwâls, in grief and perplexity, buried their dead, and, having done so, summoned their brethren to a great meeting at the Council Rock, to assemble at midnight, or as soon after as the most distant representatives of the Pechistani hill-republics could reach.

The Council Rock had for one hundred years been their Parliament House, because it was holy ground, consecrated to Allah with the blood of a saintly Sayad who had been providentially murdered there. Before that patriotic act blood-feuds

between communities and individual families had sometimes interfered with the smooth working of a session. Free fights amongst the honourable members had been of frequent occurrence, and in other ways the meeting of Parliament had always been attended with difficulties. At last a single-minded patriot conceived a project which would enable the clansmen to peacefully discuss their tribal affairs. What was wanted was a rood or two of neutral ground on which no man would dare to kill or insult his enemy.

To effect this object, this Machiavelli of Pechistan invited to his home an aged Mullah from Mankiala, a man whose sanctity and powers of working miracles were acknowledged by all sections of the tribesmen. The old saint, anxious to do good—and make money—came with alacrity, having been promised two hundred rupees in cash, as well as presents of sheep and *ghū* (clarified butter). He was honourably entertained and loaded with gifts, including the stipulated rupees. Before his departure he publicly blessed his host, and promised him a son by each of his three wives in the following year. He left after the evening meal, escorted for the first mile by the whole village.

From that point he and his ancient servitor continued their journey alone. As they passed a great rock, in a glen about a mile further on, the Mullah's late host sprang upon him and stabbed both master and man to death. The murderer then went home with the rupees in his

girdle, reached his house at cockcrow, and having quietly ascended to the roof, there prayed loudly. By this means he disturbed the slumbers of his neighbours, and established an alibi if wanted. After that he slept soundly, knowing that he had deserved well of his God and his country. However, he told no one of his good deed, not even the wives of his bosom, for to do good in secret is *sawáb* (a meritorious act).

Next morning the bodies were found, and the grateful Maizarwâls, whatever their suspicions or knowledge, asked no questions, but accepted the sacrifice as a gift from Allah himself. They buried the saint and his servant with much tom-toming and ceremony on the very spot where they had fallen, and then planted trees and erected a great shrine over the grave ; for they were good Musalmans, these simple inhabitants of Maizar. And the fame of the miracle-working shrine grew and grew in the minds of men until it became a place of pilgrimage for all Pechistan. The possession of that saint so near their village brought great gain to the Maizarwâls, and made them the most respected and influential section of the tribe ; for if they still robbed and murdered, were not such deeds committed with the approval of their saint ? and if so, they were acts meritorious in the sight of God.

Thus it was that the patriotic devotion of one far-seeing headman gave his tribe a rood or two of holy ground, where friends and enemies could sit and discuss tribal affairs without fear of assassi-

nation, for so great were the miraculous gifts of the buried saint that no man dared run the risk of offending him,—any one quarrelling and shedding blood over the grave would have been stoned as a blasphemer.

About midnight, amidst the moonlit stillness of that wind-protected glen, the leaders of the Maizarwâls, who had lured Colonel Renny and his men to partial destruction, assembled at the Council Rock. The scintillating lamps, lit every Thursday night over the grave of the saint, still shed a feeble glimmer about the great rock. Following the headmen came numbers of villagers, each with a bundle of firewood on his head. In a short time a large heap was collected, matches were struck—Japanese matches, for in what village in Asia are they not common?—the dry fuel crackled and blazed, and a great bonfire soon lit up the surroundings of the shrine.

The strips of gaudy-coloured rags on the poles and in the trees surrounding the grave fluttered in the night air. The rooks roosting in the branches of the great banyan awoke, grew restless, cawed encouragement or inquiry to each other, and finally, after exchanging views, decided to remain where they were and have their sleep out. No fire-tube ever exploded in that asylum, only crowds of foolish men sometimes sat underneath and harangued each other with solemn ineffectiveness.

At first the circle of debaters was small, and preferred abstraction to conversation. That big,

heavy man with the grey beard, Jewish nose, powerful jaws, and small, sly eyes, is the Mullah Powindah, the holiest priest in all Pechistan. He looks sulky and irritated, for the responses to his messengers have been unsatisfactory. Representatives would be sent, but the tribesmen would not commit themselves ; his action had been premature and ill-considered. To shoot down guests in cold blood was a breach of the laws of hospitality, and would bring curse, and not blessing ; besides, the butchery was small, and the spoil was only fourteen rifles, eight thousand rounds of ball ammunition, a few mules, and a medicine chest, in every phial of which there might be poison or some devilish witchcraft.

He sat there in gloomy silence, facing the arch-conspirators Sadda Khan and Alamb Khan, both of whom were now angered against him and doubtful of his powers, as his amulets and breathings had failed to make the bullets of the sepoys harmless, and many a young blood—including Sadda Khan's own Benjamin and best-loved son, to whom bodily safety had been promised—was lying, bullet-riddled, in a fresh-made grave. Besides these leaders were fifty or sixty men of lesser note, and as many Mullahs and "seekers after knowledge," of all ages, each one uncertain what the upshot of the meeting would be, each one ready to play for his own hand, and, if chance offered, himself rise to greatness over the humiliation and disgrace of the domineering Mullah Powindah.

By degrees the numbers round the big fire increased until the circles of sitters rose to four rows, aggregating about two hundred persons. Yet still they were all silent, or here and there a man talked with his neighbours in a whisper. A full house should consist of five hundred members, and as yet not half that complement had assembled.

Each group was waiting—waiting for friends and supporters who had not yet come. The burly Mullah himself now and again raised his small ferret eyes and threw them anxiously over the heads of those in front of him to the south-west—the direction of Mecca, towards which he faced. The great Mullah was waiting like the others. He expected some one, but up to 2 a.m. that some one had not arrived.

The rooks from above, or such of them as were awake, looked down from the upper branches of the many-rooted banyan tree—a survival probably from Buddhist times—and cawed to each other in noisy contempt of the stupid ways of these fatuous men. Instead of digesting their suppers in bed comfortably, they were sitting there about a bonfire, row upon row, like carrion-vultures round a dying camel, and not even speaking or abusing each other. When the rookery held meetings of their parliament they all talked and scolded at once. Every member had his say, and after a short and lively debate they proceeded to the real business of the day or night—to food-procuring or to roosting, according to the hour by sun-clock. But these stupids down below did nothing but

sit with their knees tucked up and their heads bowed, like toads asleep.

"Caw—caw," cried the look-out birds of the colony; "they are waking up at last; there is one of them asking a question, and all the others are listening."

And so it was, for Sadda Khan had stretched out his long right arm towards Mullah Powindah and announced that he and his friends would go home if there was to be any more delay.

Thus addressed, the Mullah cast one more anxious glance towards the south-west, and remarked contemptuously, "Some of our friends are white-livered, and keep away; shall we proceed without waiting longer for them?"

"Agreed," shouted many.

"Good," said the Mullah. "I propose to divide the spoil thus: a rifle and five hundred rounds of ammunition for each hamlet that lost two or more men, a mule for each chief headman, and five for myself and brother Mullahs."

"I claim," Sadda Khan said, with loud determination, "a rifle for myself in return for my boy's life. He wore five amulets, for each of which he had paid the Mullah ten rupees, yet the first bullet which hit him went through his body and killed him."

"And I," "And I," shouted several others.

"The amulets failed because the hearts of the wearers were black and false," the Mullah retorted, with the heavy solemnity which long experience had taught him carried the strongest conviction.

Looking round, he continued with assurance, "The dead men had cheated me out of my tithes last harvest, hence Allah was wrath. The sepoys fired thousands of bullets, yet only seventy men fell."

"And we fired hundreds, and only six *Sahibs* and fifty sepoys were hit," shouted a truculent-looking savage, who was conspicuous with a double-barrelled sporting rifle in his lap—the proceeds of a successful journey to Mankiala.

"That was because you could not shoot straight," roared the Mullah, with a scornful gesture.

The assemblage laughed, for the owner of the rifle was a bully, a notoriously bad marksman, and regarded with jealousy for his possession of the best weapon in Maizar. Hill democrats, like those of ancient Greece, resent any sort of individual superiority as anti-socialistic and dangerous for the public weal.

The question of the division of the spoils of war created an animated debate, which was complicated by the constant arrival of new-comers, each one of whom put in his claim for a share—some cartridges at least. It was finally decided that the Mullah should have nothing but the medicine-chest, not even a single mule.

"You are the wise man, oh, Mullah-ji," sneered Sadda Khan. "You interpret the secrets of God and of Muhammad, the Prophet of God; so of course you know those of the *Sahibs*, which are shut up in the little bottles."

"If I did, I should poison you," muttered the Mullah to himself.

As for the fourteen rifles, for any one of which a hill-man would barter wife or child, they were given by lot to the families of those who had been killed in the fight. The suggestion for the settlement of conflicting claims in that particular way came from the Mullah himself, and was accepted with acclamation. It left the decision to Fate, hence no Musalman could object to whatever his "*kismat*" was. The Mullah's sense of justice was aroused in this case by the hope that Sadda Khan would draw a blank, a hope which was fulfilled.

The next question discussed was how the war should be prosecuted. The daring and ignorant were for harrying the villages of the plains from end to end of the valley ; the old and experienced were for awaiting attack in their own fastnesses ; and a large number refused to commit themselves, alleging that their sections had no quarrel with the Sarkar ; let the Maizarwâls and others who had killed the *Sahibs* prove their prowess by some real successes and then they might join. The young bloods generally favoured isolated marauding expeditions, as likeliest to yield most loot with least fighting. But many objected ; they had friends and connections in the valley, and were the amicable relations existing between highlands and lowlands to be destroyed through indiscriminate cattle-lifting, rick-burning, and kidnapping of women and children, it would be easy for the Sarkar to starve them out by the simple expedient of a blockade.

"Yes," said Alamb Khan, who had hitherto spoken little, "we must not estrange our friends down below, as we depend on them for food and information, and above all for salt."

"I favour a *ghaza*: death to all infidels!" shouted a young new arrival of the priestly class. The man had been drugging himself with *bhang*, and was now in a state of fanatical frenzy; and forthwith he rose and began spinning round like a dancing *darwesh* of Constantinople, screaming, "*Ghaza! ghaza!* Death to all unbelievers!"

"Will no one quiet the fool?" roared Mullah Powindah, enraged at the interruption, and by a boy too.

"Quiet him yourself," Sadda Khan suggested, still sore about the loss of his rifle. "Why not promise him Paradise if he kills the Resident *Sahib*; he is already drugged for any purpose."

"The Mullah tried that a month or two ago, and instead of Paradise my nephew is in jail across the black water," shouted the uncle of Allayar Khan, the boy who had attempted to stab the Resident.

A chorus of cries now rose from different parts of the assemblage, such as, "The Mullah is an impostor!" "A cheat!" "A thief!" "His amulets are worthless." The Mullah's small, deep-set eyes flashed scorn and defiance against his detractors, but he answered not a word; he was waiting—waiting: and he knew they would all before long take his advice and follow it.

Chapter XXV

THE COUNCIL-ROCK DEBATE

THE babel was at its height when there slowly advanced from the south-west a small travel-stained man, followed by two others—his servants, apparently. The small man had a revolver in his *cummer-bund*, and walked on unconcernedly, eyes on ground, until he came to a standstill opposite Mullah Powindah.

The tongue of each shouting man in that assembly, as soon as his eyes lit on that insignificant figure, became silent. A master-mind had arrived, and the majority knew it.

The great Mullah rose and welcomed the stranger, and made room for him beside himself.

"Who is he?" whispered an ignorant man of his neighbour.

"The Munshi *Sahib*," was the reply.

"What! that beardless dwarf! is that Fazl Ali?"

"Yes; it's brain, not hair or inches, makes him great. Hush! he will speak presently."

"Whence come you?" inquired the Mullah of his friend.

"I am just out of jail. I escaped when they were hanging my servant."

"His bullet missed?"

"Yes; killed the Miss *Sahib*, I hear."

"What a blunderer!" Mullah Powindah remarked, with ill-humour. "You should have chosen a surer instrument."

"Don't rush to hasty conclusions," replied Fazl Ali, quite unperturbed. "The shot that killed the girl caused the Lady *Sahib* to lose her reason, and the double loss has made the Resident a raving lunatic, so I heard before starting."

"What a fool to be unhappy at the loss of a couple of women! He has money and can buy others," remarked the Mullah.

"Yes; but hardly as good. The lady *Sahib* was stately as an elephant, yet mild as a dove; and the girl had the gait of a partridge and the beauty of a peacock."

"Both fit for a Mullah," said the priest, licking his sensual lips.

Fazl Ali shrugged his shoulders.

"And what of your martyr? Did he die happy?" the Mullah asked, bringing his mind back to business.

"No; cursing, I expect," Fazl Ali answered. "For the fool must have heard he had shot a woman, and that his body would be burnt."

"Would be burnt? How horrible!" exclaimed the Mullah, shuddering.

Then, noticing that the assemblage was getting impatient, he added hastily, "This canaille are out

of temper with me, and many are lukewarm in the cause ; use your powers. It's a *jehad* we want. The more trouble we give these cursed Feringhees now, the more liberal will be our rewards and allowances afterwards."

Fazl Ali nodded, and rising, stood with his back to the great mass of glowing wood. He glanced with his cold, alert eyes up and down the rows of now restless Pechistanis, and then addressed them in clear, incisive terms. His words first arrested their inclination to fidget, then held their attention, and finally almost compelled their allegiance.

He began by demanding their protection, as he was a refugee seeking an asylum from his enemies,—the *Sahib log*—who had cast him into prison and sought to take his life. Proceeding, he told them that by killing *Sahibs* who were their guests they had put themselves beyond the pale of forgiveness, and that unless they were prepared to surrender the Maizarwâl headmen, their collective responsibility would be enforced. It was therefore impossible for any section to stand neutral. Whether they fought or not, the *Sahibs* would exact a penalty from them, and in any case when peace was restored trimmers would be crushed by patriots. Safety lay in a determined and united resistance ; for the greater the expenditure now incurred by the Sarkar, the more anxious would that *Sarkar* be to buy future peace by granting them liberal terms. If it should cost the *Sahibs* a hundred lakhs of rupees to blow up some of their towers, the Sarkar would respect them proportionately

and eventually quadruple their allowances and the number of their militia nominations.

"Which you and the big Mullah would filch from us. Remember Janikhel!" shouted some malcontent.

"It was the Resident robbed you, not either of us," Fazl Ali answered coldly. "We need not discuss that subject again."

"When shall we be attacked?" asked a peaceably inclined headman anxiously, as he was doing a good trade in *ghi* and hides, and wanted time to collect money due to him.

"The General *Sahib* wants to be a Lord *Sahib*, the Majors and Captains to be respectively Colonels and Majors, or, at least, what they ridiculously call Companions of the Tub. Then the youngsters will die to be Bahadurs. In fact, each man wants something for himself, and all are medal hunters. So the Sarkar will send a great army against you, and to collect it, its food and transport, will take time. I calculate there will be no move into these hills for a month or more."

"Thank God for that!" muttered the questioner, with genuine relief.

"And if your towers or even houses are blown up, what then?" asked Fazl Ali, raising his voice.

"I should have a chance of murdering you, oh mine uncle!" hissed softly Sadda Khan's nephew and would-be supplanter.

"What then?" repeated Fazl Ali, unable to resist the temptation of being sarcastic. "Why, stones and trees cost nothing; and as for labour, a

little work won't hurt you, as most of you are idle ruffians."

"Speak for yourself, Munshi *Sahib*," shouted a big brute. "I am always busy. I am in the cattle trade."

"A cattle-thief, I suppose," suggested Fazl Ali sarcastically.

A roar of laughter met this sally, as the man was the most successful lifter in the hills.

"And if you do lose your scanty crops for a season, what harm?" continued the orator, warming to his work as he saw the assemblage was now with him.

"None at all," shouted several. "For some of us will pose as friendlies, and sell the Sarkar grass, and wood, and goats, and sheep, at high prices."

"Quite so," agreed Fazl Ali. "Let every village, every hamlet, arrange to have friendlies with the Sarkar's army; and if the Sarkar does you a little damage, you can make thousands of rupees by selling supplies at your own prices to the commissariat officers and contractors."

"Well said, Munshi *Sahib*!" roared fifty voices, glamourised with the prospect of fighting safely, and making money by honourable barter at the same time.

"Yes, brothers," cried the astute orator, continuing in his sarcastic vein, yet pretending to be carried away by the general enthusiasm, "there is nothing so profitable for poor hill-men as a war with the Sarkar. When the troops march, you hide; when they sleep, if there is no moon, you

shoot into their tents in safety ; when they fight, you plant flags on rising ground and draw their fire, whilst you take careful aim from behind a rock or tree twenty yards off ; when the long convoys of laden camels are on the road, you cut the throats of loiterers and capture the camels ; when the heavy-booted rear-guard is stumbling along, whilst the General is far in front with most of his troops, you attack the leaderless soldiers. And all the time the rupees are flowing like a stream of silver into your hands, for the Sarkar takes nothing, not even worthless stones or grass, without paying whatever is asked. And when the war is over, you will be fined, it is true ; but the Sarkar will take five hundred old matchlocks at Rs.20 each, whereas your blacksmiths can make new ones at Rs. 5 each. And when this nominal fine has been paid, you will surrender hostages, who will be treated as well-paid pensioners ; your neediest youngsters will be given houses to live in and good pay, and be called a militia, but with no duties to perform and no drill to learn."

This peroration was a magnificent exaggeration, and appealed effectually to the greed, passions, and love of safe fighting of the audience.

When Fazl Ali sat down, Mullah Powindah congratulated him on his achievement.

"Well done, cousin ; they are all committed," he whispered with satisfaction. "Listen to the frenzied fools."

The whole mass of listeners had risen as one man, and were whirling their arms about their

heads, and shouting, "War! war with the Sar-kar!"

The colony of rooks above was startled ; hundreds of dry-throated birds cawed and chattered ; hundreds of wings fluttered amongst the highest branches of the great banyan.

"What is the matter down below ?" inquired the alarmed youngsters of their elders.

"The men are awake at last, and enjoying a debate, just as we do," was the answer. "Each man is shouting loudly, and no one is listening."

"Caw, caw, caw, but what's that?" screamed a quick-eared sentinel, hearing sounds of muffled movement amongst the stones near the head of the *nullah*.

Some of the look-out birds flew off to reconnoitre, whilst the others listened and strained their eyes. When the scouts returned, they reported that men were approaching from the *nullah* bed, and as they were advancing so stealthily, they were probably enemies.

"Take heed, oh, youngsters," cawed the most conceited old bird of the colony. "We always set sentries and piquets round you, but these savages set none, thinking their hills give security. They will suffer for their carelessness presently, so keep awake and look down."

So the young birds kept awake and watched curiously. They had never seen men fighting before.

The tumult in the great tree had disturbed two gorged vultures, who, perched on the topmost

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branch, were sleeping off a surfeit on a dead Government mule. Awaking with a start from heavy slumber, one of them nearly lost his balance, and opening his great wings in a flurry to steady himself, flopped about clumsily amidst the thick-leaved branches.

"What is the row?" croaked his companion angrily.

"There is a chattering around and a roar of voices beneath," was the answer.

"I smell blood," goggled the other, looking about him with keen eyes. "We are in luck, brother. I'll be off and invite all empty-bellies of our family to a big breakfast on men—nice juicy men." And the foul bird spread his offensive wings, and, after several attempts to get way on, sailed off in the air, looking down with gluttonous anticipation on the crowd about the bonfire and the band of silent men coming up from the *nullah* and creeping towards the Council Rock like panthers on their prey.

Chapter XXVI

THE AVENGERS OF BLOOD

WHEN Colonel Fitzhugh and his men reached the head of the dry *nullah*, up which they had been cautiously picking their way for the last hour, a halt was ordered. The Resident, young Tombs, and a couple of Sikhs, who had in their teens been clever cattle thieves, but were now smart soldiers and expert *shikaris*, reconnoitred the ground ahead.

They found that the rock, about the foot of which the hill parliament was in session, occupied the centre of a small basin, about a quarter of a mile in advance of the position where their main body were resting. The great banyan tree was on the farther, or Maizar, side of the rock, whilst the log fire, round which men were sitting in closely packed rows, was on the hither, or Sherauna, side. Round the shrine of the buried saint was a small grove and garden, outside which the ground had been cleared of stones for a space of from seventy

to eighty yards square. The stones themselves had been collected in several great piles on the outskirts of this quadrangle. It would have been easy to approach within two hundred yards of the rock, and thence to pour in a succession of volleys upon the crowd congregated there ; but that would not have satisfied the leader of the expedition. What he had determined to achieve, or die in the attempt, was to kill or seize and carry off Mullah Powindah and Fazl Ali, if he were there, as well as the ringleaders of the Maizar headmen, Sadda Khan and Alamb Khan. The shooting down of as many of the others as was possible was merely a secondary object.

"We must divide our force," whispered Colonel Fitzhugh to Tombs. "Sher Singh, with twenty-five men, well spread out, will take up a position on rising ground above where we are, and you and I with the rest of the men will then creep forwards and rush them from somewhere near the rock."

"What will the signal be for Sher Singh to open fire ?" asked Tombs.

"We shall have to make a dash for it from behind one of these cairns. As soon as the Subadar sees us begin our rush he can pour in a volley or two before we get amongst the enemy."

The reconnoitring party now rejoined their main body, and the plan of attack was fully explained to Sher Singh.

"I form your right and left wings, *Sahib*, and

you assault with your centre?" said the veteran, grasping the whole plan.

"Exactly; and you cover our withdrawal as well."

"And from the moment you advance beyond the cairns I blaze away into them until you approach the log-fire?" continued the Subadar.

"Yes; your difficulty will be to see when to begin and when to cease firing."

"Leave that to me, *Sahib*," said the old man, with proud self-confidence.

The whole force then advanced to the position whence their leader had made his observations. They then again halted, when Sher Singh extended his party to right and left up the hill-sides, whilst Colonel Fitzhugh led his men to lower ground in the centre.

Now began the perilous part of the adventure. The two British officers with their twenty-five sepoyys crept noiselessly forward, a slight undulation in the ground in front of them concealing log-fire and enemy from their view. As they were cresting the rise, the Resident suddenly stopped and lay down on his stomach, motioning with his hand to those behind him to do the same. He had seen, and what is more he had heard. They were now within a hundred yards of the nearest fringe of the assemblage, and only open ground intervened.

Colonel Fitzhugh's heart beat wildly, his face was stern and relentless, and the fierce anticipations within him made him feel for the moment

dizzy and confused. The supreme moment of his life had come ; he would, he must, keep cool. Tombs crept up to him, almost divining his emotions. The boy had seen and heard too, though his hearing was without understanding.

"That is the voice,—I know it," the Resident said, in an excited whisper.

"Keep cool, sir ; we have them nicely," returned the Subaltern.

"You don't realize," was the hurried rejoinder, "it is Fazl Ali who is speaking. I wonder his cold, hard, superior style does not irritate them as it does me."

"He is a little beggar, I can see," Tombs remarked with composure. "This is like stalking a "Royal" in the Highlands, but far more exciting."

The Colonel laughed grimly at the simile. It was a stalk they were engaged upon, but the quarry was no red deer, but four man-eaters in the midst of five hundred wild beasts.

Here one of the young Sikh *shikaris* touched Colonel Fitzhugh on the arm and whispered, "*Sahib*, if we crawl to our left a little, we can then move straight to the big cairn without being seen."

"You are right, I think," the Colonel replied.

He then consulted Tombs, who fully agreed, but added that the gathering was so large they would hardly be able to attempt to carry off any prisoners.

"No," replied the Colonel ; "it must be killing, not capturing."

The plan of attack was then quietly explained

to the sepoys, the stooping advance was made, and they were all soon afterwards collected behind the big cairn.

Colonel Fitzhugh moved round it on hands and knees to make his final observations. He found himself well beyond the radius of light thrown out by the log-fire, and not more than twenty yards from the outermost row of sitters. Fazl Ali was directly facing him. The eloquent and crafty Munshi evidently commanded the whole attention of his audience, for every face was turned in his direction. He had begun his peroration, describing the advantages immediate and subsequent of a war with the Sarkar. Colonel Fitzhugh felt the power of the man's words, noticed the rapt enthusiasm of his hearers, and the growing commotion amongst the roosters in the great banyan behind the orator, and noiselessly rejoined his comrades.

"Yellow-Face has turned their heads ; they will be like mad bulls presently," he said hurriedly to Tombs. "Our advance will not be noticed until we are amongst them. You and I will lead, the men will follow six abreast."

So saying he rose, and the twenty-five sepoys headed by the two British officers, each of the latter revolver in hand, and sword ready for use, stepped round the cairn and began to walk forwards in a body.

As they emerged from the protection of the cairn, a great pulsation seemed to agitate the crowd. Shouts of "War ! war with the Sarkar !"

filled the air, and increased in volume until an inarticulate din of hoarse cries was alone perceptible. The upper branches of the great banyan tree, too, were in commotion, alive with chattering, fluttering rooks, almost as perturbed as the men beneath them, whilst two vultures spread their wings and sailed heavily over the roaring, seething multitude, but on passing the assaulting party suddenly swerved upwards, seeing the rifles and fixed bayonets of the sepoys.

The change from silent attention to babel was so sudden that the Colonel and his men stood still for a few seconds. Their former peril was increased, as their enemies were now standing, instead of sitting, and many were whirling their matchlocks round their heads, regardless of their neighbours.

As Colonel Fitzhugh stood irresolute for the moment, twenty-five rifles rang out from his left and right rear, and a hail of bullets thudded into the densely packed crowd. The effect was almost immediate: the shouting lulled, then ceased, then broke out again in hoarse yells of consternation. A frenzy of panic had seized all. Instead of "War!" "War!" the cry was now "Treachery!" Instead of union, there was disruption, dispersal. Man fought with man, the tendency of individuals being to force their way to their friends, form groups, and then collectively move in a direction of supposed safety or towards their villages.

The Colonel's momentary indecision was ended. "Keep together and follow me!" he shouted to

his men, and in a compact body they pushed on, direct for their goal, the centre, the heart of the agitated mass of maddened humanity in front of them. They charged through the struggling, frightened throngs, pushing steadily on—on towards their prey.

They were now almost within striking distance of the Mullah Powindah, and the cowering priests and “seekers-after-knowledge” about him. The great fire, now a furnace red and fierce, still burnt brightly, throwing out tremendous heat and lighting up the scene. The crowd was thick about the seploys, many of the most ignorant converging on the priests, as if near them was safety. Progress was slow, but the bayonet gradually cleared the way.

With his eyes now fixed on Mullah Powindah, now hunting round for the smooth-faced Munshi of his detestation, Colonel Fitzhugh saw a strange tragedy enacted before him. A youth worked his way to where Sudda Khan was standing, and plunged an Afghan knife into his stomach, and as the victim fell hissed into his ears, “I did it, uncle!” and then began to worm his way through the crowd, a look of malignant exultation on his face.

It all passed in a few seconds. That the passions in a private blood-feud should be let loose at such a moment accorded with Pathan character, but all the same was horrible. Colonel Fitzhugh was fascinated, and almost forgot his purpose for the moment, but pressure from behind carried him forward and brought him face to face with Mullah

Powindah. The priest was terror-struck — the avengers of blood were on him. He sprang forward, swerving to avoid the two Englishmen, and was transfixed on the bayonet of one of the wedge of sepoys. Fazl Ali was now visible, cool, collected and active as a panther. His hour had come, and he knew it, but he was going to die game. Master and man saw each other simultaneously. Colonel Fitzhugh fired his revolver at him, but missed, and was about to fire again, when he was dazed by a blow on his head from the butt-end of a matchlock swung by some hill-man, raging rabidly amongst the sepoys. Quick as thought Fazl Ali fired one, two, three shots before his enemy could recover or close with him. The two men fell together. In an instant Fazl Ali was on his legs again, whilst his master lay still. The Munshi was about to put another bullet into his prostrate foe, when Tombs struck the revolver out of his hand.

“Kill the *Sahib* and Kafir Sikhs! kill! kill! kill!” he kept shouting whilst he dodged in and out amongst them. A confused *mélée* ensued. Fazl Ali was down and up several times, but at last his shrill cry of “Kill! kill!” ceased, and as his strength was leaving him, he staggered towards the spot where lay the man whom he had just brought low. But he did not live to reach his enemy, for the levelled bayonets of two of the faithful Sikhs, who were on guard over the fallen Resident, thrust him back and back till, tripping over a body, he fell into the fringe of the furnace behind him.

The little band of heroes could do no more.

They had accomplished the object of their leader. Nothing now remained but to rescue his body and extricate themselves from the welter about them. As yet the majority of the Pechistanis were too confused to realize their presence. The cessation of the hail of bullets whilst the *mélée* was in progress near the log-fire had given relief to some, but had inspired new terrors in others, as none felt sure in what direction to seek safety.

Standing over Colonel Fitzhugh's body, Tombs shouted to his men to form round him and force a passage out. Then he stooped over the Colonel, and, to his joy, found him semi-conscious.

"If I carry you on my back, sir, can you hold on?"

"My arm is broken, but I'll try," was the faint response.

"Never mind; I'll carry you like a sack on my shoulder," returned the athlete, and forthwith he staggered off with his wounded leader in his arms.

They made slow progress through the still swaying groups of hill-men, but discipline and the bayonet gradually cleft a passage. Before the big cairn was again reached the firing had recommenced. It caused the leaderless mob to head off in the opposite direction.

Halting beside the cairn, Tombs found three of his men missing, whilst most of the others, like himself, were bleeding or bruised. He looked back towards the Council Rock, calculating the chances of finding the poor fellows.

"No use, *Sahib*," said one of the sepoys. "They are dead and hacked to bits by now."

"All right; forward as before," was the order, but this time a sepoy helped to carry the Colonel.

They were soon in comparative safety behind Sher Singh's firing line. Colonel Fitzhugh was now laid on the ground and his arm hastily bandaged, to stop the bleeding. Whilst Tombs was so engaged the Subadar joined him.

"Try brandy, sir; it cures most hurts for Sikhs and *Sahibs* alike," said the jolly veteran, who often thanked his *gurū* for giving him a taste for good liquor. The Subadar was right, for when the stimulant had been swallowed the wounded man opened his eyes and recognised those about him.

"Where are you hit, sir, besides the arm?" asked Tombs.

"I don't know—head and ribs, I believe. Was the work done?"

"Yes, sir, well done."

Colonel Fitzhugh smiled with vindictive satisfaction, and asked them to support him on his legs. They did so, and he took a comprehensive glance round and then at the stars.

"Subadar," he said, "we must get back at once. It will be light soon, and then they will follow us."

Sher Singh went back to his men to carry out his order, whilst Tombs superintended the removal of the Resident and several of the sepoys, whose wounds and exhaustion incapacitated them for walking. By the time that the head of the *nullah* was reached grey dawn was upon them. It

facilitated movement, but it also disclosed to the dispersed tribesmen that their only enemy had been a handful of sepoys. With daylight their panic and mutual suspicions gave place to feelings of rage and shame. They quickly organized themselves, and began to harass the retreat of their infidel foe, who had, so to speak, pulled their beards and caused them to eat dirt in the midst of their own mountains, not two miles from the inviolate village of Maizar.

One considerable body prepared to directly follow the little party retreating down the *nullah*, whilst another started on a *détour*, intending to push on fast and head the sepoys a mile lower down at the point where the defile narrowed into a gorge.

Subadar Sher Singh met these movements by dividing his force. He sent half his men down the *nullah* to protect those carrying the wounded from direct attack, and pushed on himself with the others to anticipate the heading movement. He hurried past Tombs' party, and began to scale the cliffs above the point where the torrent bed had, in the course of ages, burst a way for itself through a bisecting ridge of the mountains ; but the ascent was arduous, the ground unknown, and by the time he was half-way up came dropping shots from above, proving that some of the nimbler-footed Pechistanis had already crowned the cliff.

He had been forestalled.

His men ensconced themselves behind rocks and trees, and picked off every Pechistani who showed

himself; but the position was such that he could not prevent the enemy from occupying the cliff overhanging the narrows of the gorge. The sound of firing from up the *nullah*, too, showed that the Colonel's party and rear-guard were being pressed. They would all shortly be hemmed in, and there would be no hope of escape except by running the gauntlet through the very throat of the defile.

The firing from up the *nullah* approached nearer and nearer, and soon the sepoyes carrying the wounded were visible as they came round a bend in the torrent bed. Presently the perplexed Subadar saw two sepoyes detach themselves from Tombs' party and run straight for the gorge itself, and after a little time one of the men returned to Tombs. Then a sepoy doubled towards the crags on which Sher Singh had established himself, whilst Tombs' party continued their hurried march straight on towards the gorge itself—"into the jaws of death," the Subadar would have said, had he known the ballad.

Meanwhile the sepoy was climbing the lower crags, and presently his halloo echoed up to the Subadar's eyrie.

"Withdraw your men," the sepoy shouted, "into the gorge as soon as the wounded reach it."

"By whose order?"

"Tombs *Sahib's*."

"That will be certain death. None of us will get through," grumbled Sher Singh, preparing to obey.

As soon as the party carrying or helping the

wounded had disappeared in the gorge Sher Singh began his retirement. His men and those of the rear-guard converged on the narrow mouth of the pass about the same time, each in turn supporting the withdrawal of the other. Proceeding some hundred yards down the passage between its precipitous sides, they discovered Tombs' party collected under the shelter of an overhanging wall of rock.

On either side for some distance the occasional rush of great floods, charged with boulders and stones, had, in process of ages, so worn the rocks up to flood level that a regiment of cavalry might have halted in perfect safety from missiles of any sort discharged from any point on the cliffs above. During the night march up the *nullah* Tombs had noticed the curious gallery through which they passed before emerging into a more open region with hills receding on either side, and having some knowledge of geology, he had formed an opinion as to the effect on soft rock of ages of scouring. Realizing the nature of the Subadar's dilemma, he had sent two sepoys on ahead—one to verify or disprove his assumption, and the other to run on before the pass could be closed to tell Spottiswoode how they were situated and hurry him on if necessary.

Whilst Subadar Sher Singh was congratulating Tombs *Sahib* on the excellence of his tactics, a scout left at the upper entrance to the gorge came in, and announced that the enemy were now crowding on in confident pursuit.

"We are in luck, *Sahib*," said Sher Singh, blinking his eyes with anticipated enjoyment. "They think we are caught and trying to force our way through the lower end. The trapping is ours this time."

"Bar the road quickly, Subadar," Tombs ordered, thinking the man was inclined to be talkative, and lose precious time.

The Subadar led his men back to a bend in the gorge. They had hardly taken up their position when the sounds of an advancing multitude reached their ears. The Pechistanis were evidently jubilant, shouting their war-cries and coming on in force. The Subadar listened intently, standing well ahead of his men. Presently he beckoned them on, arranged them two deep across the width of the water passage, and then, placing himself at one end of the front line, they advanced round the corner. The straight narrow roadway in front seemed blocked with shouting hill-men about fifty yards ahead. Suddenly seeing a wall of Sikhs barring further advance, the Pechistanis stood still, and then recoiled in confusion, whilst those behind, ignorant of what had happened, still pressed on.

"Commence firing!" shouted the Subadar.

The huddled mass turned as one man and forged back to shelter beyond the entrance to the narrows, suffering terribly in their flight. Their losses and the tremendous reverberations amongst the over-hanging precipices caused the Pechistanis to suppose that the retreating Sikhs had been reinforced, and sickened most of them for further fighting.

The bravest spirits scaled the cliffs to join in intercepting the retiring Sikhs lower down in the defile, but the larger number trudged off in sorry plight towards Maizar.

The noise of firing in the gorge had ceased when the sound of a distant fusillade reached the ears of the band congregated about their wounded leader. He was at the time lying in an improvised litter, looking white and bloodless, as one dead. Hearing the buzz of conjecture around him, he opened his eyes and listened like the others.

"Is it Spottiswoode?" he asked in a whisper, as Tombs stooped over him.

"Yes, sir, it must be. We shall be moving on soon, I expect."

"Thank God," he murmured, before he relapsed into his previous passive state.

Some time went by, during which the firing became more frequent. Presently a scouting sepoy returned and reported that bodies of the enemy could be seen on the cliffs lower down, either stationary or slowly retiring. Tombs himself went forward to reconnoitre, and on his return, after a brief colloquy with the Subadar, the welcome order to move on was given. The men fell in with alacrity. Once beyond the narrows, the pass opened out considerably. The going was rough and progress slow; but all were cheerful. They could see their own men crowning the next narrows, whilst the Pechistanis were either sullenly giving way or firing from behind shelter far up on the hill-sides. It was evident that Spottiswoode had

forestalled them, and held a formidable position commanding the further route down the *nullah*.

The enemy might still, with heavy loss to themselves, have cut off Colonel Fitzhugh's party, had they swooped down with determination and opposed progress at a point beyond the range of Spottiswoode's rifles ; but their hearts had already begun to fail them. They had had enough of fighting, —match-locks could not contend against breech-loaders. Then they naturally magnified the strength of the relieving force. Besides this, the key to the next gorge was in the hands of their enemies.

The slow and toilsome retreat was now continued. Again and again a knot of *ghâzis* would descend the hill-side, and attempt to hold a point above the line of route, or even to run in upon the retiring sepoys ; but such magnificent courage was useless. *Ghâzis* fight with swords, not guns, and a *ghâzi* rush can hardly be pushed home over rocks and boulders. Moreover, there was no cohesion amongst these groups of devoted men. Some were shot down, whilst others, finding it impossible to reach their enemy, took shelter, or lay quiet, feigning death, until the retreating unbelievers had passed by them.

At last the next narrow passage was gained, and the lusty cheers of the Sikhs crowning its cliffs were answered by faint shouts of "*Gûrû-ji-ki-fatteh*" from their battle-worn comrades in the pass itself.

Rumours of a great fight at the Council Rock had early reached Spottiswoode, as he was advanc-

ing to cover the retreat of the assaulting force. Surgeon-Captain Franks had wisely provided some stretchers, and was already in the defile. A short halt was made, during which all that was possible was done for the wounded, and then the retirement down the *nullah* was continued.

By 10 a.m. the whole band—it could hardly be called a force—was once more in British territory, and two hours later was enjoying ease and a good breakfast at the Sherauna Fort.

The wounded were now properly attended to. Those who were fit for conveyance to the station hospital at Mankiala were despatched thither at once. The bad cases, some half a dozen in all, were treated at the fort. The worst was that of Colonel Fitzhugh. His left arm had been shattered above the elbow by one of Fazl Ali's bullets, another had struck but glanced off a rib, whilst the blow on the head which had felled him had caused congestion of the brain and possibly fracture of the skull.

Dr. Franks feared it would be impossible to save the Colonel's arm. The tourniquet hastily improvised during the enforced halt in the upper gorge had doubtless prevented the patient from bleeding to death; but, being applied too tightly, had stopped all circulation, in consequence of which symptoms of gangrene were present. Amputation would involve grave risk, yet the risk would have to be run.

In his dilemma the doctor decided to send in to Mankiala and obtain a second opinion.

Chapter XXVII

RESURRECTION

ON the morning after Colonel Fitzhugh's departure for Sherauna, young Lorimer, according to promise, made inquiries at the Residency, and then hurriedly rode off to join his chief. He was so pre-occupied by the surprising nature of the report made to him by Doctor Atherby-Jones that he had gone half-way before he began to notice his surroundings.

When his mind had recovered its equilibrium, he was surprised to see that traffic on the road was brisker than usual, and that people were all moving in one direction—towards the station. Some Hindu families appeared to be flitting, bag and baggage, their portable property loaded on bullocks and donkeys. There was much excitement and gesticulation going on amongst wayfarers and villagers. Curiosity induced Lorimer to inquire, the cause.

What, had the *Sahib* not heard the news? The hill tribes were up, the troops garrisoning Sherauna had been cut to pieces, the Resident slain and the fort taken. So said the fleeing Hindus.

The Musalmans had another story: the *Sarkāri fauj* (Government forces) had gained a great victory, and killed many head-men and priests.

Lorimer pressed on, anxious to know the truth. He now recalled how the Resident had said just before starting, "You may hear news of me before I receive any from you." Evidently his chief had gone out to Sherauna determined on attempting to surprise the enemy before they were even aware that he had left the cantonment. At the next changing post Lorimer met a Muhammadan trooper riding into Mankiala and questioned him.

"Well, yes, *Sahib*," the man replied with unconcern, as if fighting at an outpost were of daily occurrence, "there was a row, and the wounded were being brought in when I left, and I am bearing a letter to the Colonel Doctor-*Sahib*."

"Was the Resident *Sahib* wounded?" Lorimer asked.

"Yes, or killed; but I only saw his body being carried in on a litter. A sheet was over it."

Lorimer spurred on, and when nearing the outpost met a small convoy of wounded sepoyes being conveyed in camel-panniers to the station hospital at head-quarters. From some of their escort he learnt that his chief was still alive, but reported to be dangerously wounded. He soon after reached Sherauna, and heard particulars of the surprise of the great Pechistani *jirga* at the Council Rock. If he had ever deprecated the Resident on account of his indolence, carelessness

in money matters, and dislike for routine-work, he had nothing now but admiration for the man who had planned and carried out that morning's successful feat of arms.

The inspecting officer's quarters in the fort-enclosure had, for the occasion, been turned into a hospital. Colonel Fitzhugh lay upstairs in the large room of the tower. Tombs had taken charge of the nursing, an office which Lorimer was at once allowed to share. Admitted into the sick-room, he gazed with a sad heart on the terrible changes caused by wounds and exhaustion on his chief. The eye-balls were sunken, the flesh wasted, so that the outline of the facial bones was clearly defined, and the colour of the skin was a bluish-white. The unshaven chin and cheeks, the closed eyes, and the bandage round the head heightened the young man's impression that death must be near. Those who have seen the ghastly alteration in the physiognomy of a sufferer a few hours after he has been seized with cholera will realize how the wreck of manhood before him must have shocked Lorimer.

Next morning the patient's arm was amputated. Doctor Franks had waited until another surgeon came out from the cantonment, and they had decided in consultation that without amputation the case must terminate fatally, whereas otherwise there was a reasonable probability of recovery. The operation was performed, and, for several days and nights afterwards, Colonel Fitzhugh hovered between life and death, watched over by the two

doctors in turn, occasionally relieved by Lorimer or Tombs. The last-named had made light of his own wounds, though the needle had to be used to bring some of them together ; and as for his concussions, he laughed over them—he had often had worse at school, he asserted.

During these days of supreme anxiety the news of Colonel Fitzhugh's desperate exploit rang throughout India and Great Britain, and the general verdict was that, though ably planned and resolutely executed, it was a piece of foolhardy daring—it was, in short, magnificent, but not war. True, it had been successful, if success meant the accomplishment of the immediate object sought, which was the killing of certain Mullahs and leading men; but if in result it only embittered and combined the tribes against us, then the sacrifice of life had been vain.

Happily the wounded man was ignorant of these premature criticisms on his great performance, otherwise with his impatient spirit he would have fretted himself into a fever. The longer in reason he lay in a state of dreamy inanimation, provided that he took nourishment, the better were his chances of recovery.

On the sixth day, after his arm had been amputated, young Lorimer was watching beside him. He was less restful than usual, his eyes were more frequently open and appeared to be observant. They dwelt successively with a sense of recognition on different familiar objects in the room, and finally rested on Lorimer himself. The hitherto

expressionless face clouded, and a look of puzzled apprehension spread over it. The mind was working—working. Lorimer ostentatiously looked out of the window, whilst in reality closely watching his charge. The patient's right hand stole out from beneath the sheet, and passing to the socket of what had been his left arm, felt about the bandages. There was nothing—nothing.

In an instant the truth was revealed to the inquirer. He remembered the fight, his fall, and some of the incidents in the retreat. He turned his head, seeking information, towards his assistant and his lips moved. Lorimer held the feeding cup to his lips, and he swallowed some mouthfuls of chicken extract. The nourishment gave him strength. Lorimer thought he heard his chief say, "We succeeded, we killed them, did we not?" and, to stop him from attempting to talk, the young man wisely gave him the outlines of his achievement. A gratified smile stole over his face, and rested on it for some seconds, but presently gave place to a look of intense anxiety.

Turning his head from side to side, and searching the walls and chairs, he whispered,— "My waistcoat, the one I wore, bring it here."

When it had been brought to him, he said, "Feel in the pockets."

Lorimer did so, and produced the little morocco case containing the injector and the fragments of a broken phial. The patient groaned at the sight, muttered curses about his bad luck, and after rising on his elbow and looking round the room

wildly, and vainly—if his object was to find a means to commit suicide—lay back exhausted and closed his eyes. The watcher withdrew out of sight, hoping that his charge would now keep quiet and perhaps sleep. Soon after Colonel Fitzhugh became restless again, and Lorimer rose and, stooping over him, arranged the pillows, and gently replaced the uncovered arm under the sheet.

"I am not going to die, am I?" the wounded man inquired, as if aware the answer would be disappointing.

"No; you are gaining strength, and will soon, I hope, be fit to be moved to the Residency," was the reply.

At the mention of his home the unhappy man shuddered, and a look of horror seized him. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, and he moaned pitifully.

"Are you in pain, sir?" Lorimer asked.

"Yes—no. Tell me what has happened—tell me all you know," he demanded, with feeble vehemence.

"There is no worst, sir. Both ladies are doing well," was the positive reply.

On hearing these words the patient started violently, and sat up in bed; his pallid cheeks grew hectic, and he stared in suspicious wonder at his informer. Then he moaned to himself, "No, it cannot be; they are dead, both dead, and he is afraid to tell me."

He threw himself on his back again, and kept moving his head about uneasily, all the while

apparently talking to himself. Lorimer felt his brow; it was hot but moist. There were no indications of fever. That was satisfactory. As the restlessness increased, Lorimer, following the standing instructions, gave his chief morphia. By degrees the movements ceased and the patient lay still.

When relieved by Tombs, Lorimer sought out Doctor Franks—who had several bad cases on his hands—and told him what had occurred.

"I have heard him say strange things in his moments of delirium," said the doctor, "and gathered he has the hallucination that both ladies are dead."

"Would it not be wise if Mrs. Fitzhugh were to come to him?" suggested Lorimer.

"The journey would be very trying for her. Besides, I hope the Resident will be strong enough to be moved home in a few days. There is not much comfort here."

"Might not the change of scene and the feeling that she was nursing her husband to convalescence be good for Mrs. Fitzhugh?" Lorimer inquired, persisting in his idea.

"Well, you may be right," replied the doctor. "If he has a good night you might ride in and bring Mrs. Fitzhugh out. I can easily arrange for relays of doolie-bearers on the road."

Lorimer took the first turn of watching that evening—eight o'clock until midnight. When he entered the room, the patient was lying on his back, sleeping heavily, his right arm extended

over the counterpane, the stump of his left hidden under it. The week's growth of his beard and whiskers had previously been shaved off, making him look clean and comparatively fresh. The pallor of his face, and the wasting of flesh in his cheeks and about his eyes, proclaimed the severity of the crisis through which he had been passing. Provided that he could be kept quiet and avoid the wear and tear of mental worry, it was now certain that he might be fit to be moved to his house next day, or the day after at latest. If so, it would be best that Mrs. Fitzhugh should be saved the fatigue of the journey out and back and the discomforts of twenty-four hours in a small frontier outpost.

The night wore on, and Lorimer was deep in the enjoyment of a realistic novel, when he heard the patient ask who was in the room.

"I, Lorimer," the young man answered, going to the bedside.

"I have slept long and soundly, have I not?" the Resident asked.

"Yes, sir; you will be moved to the—I mean, home in a day or two."

"Home—home?" the wounded man repeated suspiciously; "I have none now."

"In one sense not," Lorimer acquiesced, wishing to avoid the exciting theme.

"In what sense?" the patient queried irritably.

"Well, I meant we are all birds of passage in India, and our true homes are, of course, in England."

"What nonsense! A man's home is where his wife and children are," the Resident said with increasing irritation; but immediately supplemented the hasty declaration by adding with mournful conviction, "But I have no wife—only a motherless boy."

"You love Alan, sir, don't you?"

"I did as the image of my poor wife, but now the likeness will make me hate him—at least, wish to avoid looking on him."

"Why, sir?"

"Why?" and he raised himself with the help of his right arm, and looking at Lorimer, exclaimed excitedly, "You ask why? Don't you know Mary is dead, and how she died?"

"What can you mean? Do calm yourself, and rid your mind of chimeras."

"I'll tell you," Colonel Fitzhugh continued, lowering his voice and looking round the room furtively, as if to see that there was no other listener.

Lorimer put an arm round him and tried to induce him to lie down again, but he resisted, and whispered, "Yes, I'll tell you, but no one else; I can trust you. I gave her an over-dose of morphia by—by mistake. I could not bear to think that my wife, who believed in me, should know that I was regarded by Government as a dishonourable man. Though Fazl Ali is dead, the accounts and payment orders and demands for money remain, and I shall be disgraced."

"My dear, dear Colonel Fitzhugh," Lorimer said

imploringly, "you are entirely in error. Your accounts are square and your wife is alive."

"Lies ! lies !" the patient cried wildly. "You are afraid to tell me the truth. I injected the morphia myself, and she blessed me before she slept her death-sleep—told me I had been a good husband to her. As God is my witness," and here he raised his voice and facing his supporter spoke with solemn earnestness, "I killed her because I loved her ; and as for the accounts, a special officer has been appointed to examine them. Oh, Mary ! Mary ! it was better that you should die in sleep, loving me and believing in me than die of shock upon learning my disgrace !"

Whilst he was delivering this strange farrago, Lorimer felt helpless. It was better perhaps to let him exhaust himself, and then probably he would listen to reason. When he had ended, he put his face close to Lorimer's, and asked, in a startlingly calm voice, "You believe me, don't you?"

"Listen," said the young man impressively, speaking with slow distinctness. "I repeat it, your wife is alive, and your accounts are in order. Mrs. Fitzhugh is, has been, very ill, or she would have come out herself to nurse you."

"I don't believe you," the miserable man cried ; "the doctor tells you to keep me quiet and humour me, and you do your best. Go away—I don't want you ; I want to die and join Mary. I had the means of death in that pocket, but the stuff escaped when the bottle was broken. I suppose one of Fazl Ali's bullets smashed it."

"Your wife is alive, I tell you," Lorimer reiterated. He could think of no other phrase, and so repeated the formula again and again.

"I suppose you will tell me next that Dolly is also alive, and was never shot," scoffed the patient, persisting in his belief that the doctor and Lorimer were in a conspiracy to keep the truth from him.

"Miss Carew was not dead yesterday, though still dangerously ill," asserted the young man resolutely.

"Proof! give me proof!" exclaimed the patient eagerly, his incredulity beginning to be shaken.

"I can give it; I have it on me, I think," cried Lorimer gladly. "I ought to have thought of Mrs. Fitzhugh's letter before!"

The patient eyed him, intently expectant. Lorimer withdrew his supporting arm, and laid Colonel Fitzhugh's head gently back on the pillow. He next searched all his pockets, and could not find what he sought for. And all the while the wounded man was watching him, and kept on ejaculating, "Well! Well!" impatiently.

"The letter is in my other coat in my tent," Lorimer explained, much disappointed at his fruitless search.

"Go and fetch it then," was the quick command.

"Will you rest quietly as you are, sir, if I go?" inquired Lorimer, in doubt.

"Yes, yes."

He went, and soon after returned with a scrap

of paper in his hand. Colonel Fitzhugh clutched it and read the contents with a deepening flush on his cheeks. The note was in pencil, very short, and as follows :—"A slight improvement in Dolly ; temperature lower, cough easier. I help to nurse her, but am still very weak myself. Write daily about my noble George."

He read it through several times ; at first seemed overwhelmingly pleased, but after turning it over and over between his fingers, and failing to discover any date, he began to grow suspicious again. It is part of the conspiracy, he thought. Putting the note under his pillow, he said mournfully,—

"It is Mary's hand, but might have been written when Dolly was poorly a month ago."

"How so, sir?" Lorimer inquired, in perplexity.

"There is no date—but women, in a hurry, never do date their letters, I admit," he replied—"and Dolly had a feverish cold last month when you and I were in camp."

"What can I do to convince you, sir?" Lorimer asked, helpless at such determined incredulity.

"Bring my wife to me," was the decisive reply.

"I will do so," Lorimer said quietly. "By this time to-morrow Mrs. Fitzhugh shall be here."

Colonel Fitzhugh heard the life-giving promise, yet still he doubted. He had been convinced they were both dead, but now he had hope. For the time his other troubles were nothing to him. He would die happy if he could see his wife again, make his confession to her, and when she knew all, have her forgiveness. He felt it would be

hard on poor Dolly that she should be left to the sole care of a professional nurse, but his case was more pressing ; besides, seeing was believing, and until Mary's hand lay in his, and Mary's eyes met his, how could he be sure that Dolly was really living ?

Lorimer stood beside him whilst these thoughts were rushing through his brain, and intuitively guessed the nature of the emotions which were to some extent reflected in the rapid changes of expression on his features. "He believes, yet won't surrender his unbelief," said the young man to himself. "He knows his wife is alive, is very ill and is nursing Dolly, hovering on the confines of the shadowy land, and yet he must drag Mrs. Fitzhugh out here to see with his own eyes that I have told him the truth. Well, he is a man and selfish. I wonder if that morphia story is purely imagination ? Dr. Jones said she had been over-dosed, and might never have waked had he not seen her in time. If Colonel Fitzhugh did it knowingly, he was mad when he did it—that is the explanation."

"What, not gone yet ?" complained the patient peevishly, when he noticed the young man's continued presence.

"Do you want me to start now, at midnight, sir ?"

"The sooner the better. I want certainty. You show me a glimpse of heaven, then help me to enter," Colonel Fitzhugh answered, with the humility of a sinner imploring a kindness of God.

His variations of mood indicated the working of his brain and his inability to exercise any self-restraint.

Seeing that his prayer would be answered, he added appealingly, "You don't know in what a hell I was living for days before that fight."

"All right, sir," said Lorimer cheerily; "you will try, won't you, to look your best when Mrs. Fitz-hugh comes, and get strong enough to nurse her should she break down?"

"I promise you," was the satisfied reply. "Let me have my food and I'll go to sleep."

Lorimer gave him his slops—the doctor still allowed no solids—arranged the bedclothes, and left.

When ready for his ride, he waked Tombs, and the two went together into the sick-room. As they were entering, Lorimer saw that Colonel Fitz-hugh was trying to read his wife's note. The lamp had been turned down. Hence, unless he knew the contents by heart, which probably he did, he could hardly have distinguished the words. Still, he could see enough to convince him that the writing was his wife's, and that probably gave him consolation. Becoming aware that he was not alone, he hurriedly and furtively slipped the note under his pillow and asked who was there.

The two young men advanced, and whilst Tombs turned up the lamp, the patient regarded Lorimer, and seeing that he was equipped for his journey, said, with a ring of happiness in his voice, "Now I begin to believe I shall see her again."

Then he called his assistant to the bedside and held out his hand. The young fellow took it.

"Nearer," Colonel Fitzhugh urged, in a low voice, "nearer still. I don't want Tombs to hear."

Lorimer stooped his head, and the Colonel whispered in his ear, "You are a good friend. Tell her—Mary, I mean—I love her; and if Dolly is well enough to receive a message, ask Mary to say to her I owe her my life. I—I love them both. Good-bye."

Lorimer wrung the hand he was still holding and left.

When he had gone, the Colonel asked Tombs to put the lamp very low, as he wished to be quiet. Tombs did so, and the patient composed himself to sleep.

The rest of the night passed without incident. About dawn Tombs woke with a guilty sense that he had failed in his duty, but a glance at his patient reassured him. The Colonel was still asleep, and dreaming evidently—a waking dream, for a smile was on his face and in his hand was the scrap of paper.

Tombs knew what it was, for Lorimer had told him about the note.

Soon after the patient awoke, and noticing what was enclosed in his hand, threw a glance of inquiry towards the watcher, who discreetly pretended to be dozing in his comfortable chair. Colonel Fitzhugh hastily put the paper to his lips and then slid it under his pillow.

"Tombs," he called softly.

"Yes, sir," said the boy, yawning and stretching himself, to maintain the illusion.

"Sleeping at your post, I swear!" cried the patient gaily. "I'll put you under arrest if I don't have breakfast in ten minutes."

"You shall, sir."

After a cup of tea, Colonel Fitzhugh announced that he felt he was getting well.

"I am sure you are; you look pounds better for that long sleep."

"It's happiness," was the explanation; "I feel that to-day will be the happiest in my life."

Chapter XXVIII

REDINTEGRATIO AMORIS

WHEN late next afternoon Mrs. Fitzhugh was helped out of her dooly at the gate of the Sherauna Fort she was looking remarkably well, and as beautiful as before her illness. A dooly is a sort of curtained cot with embryo legs, very awkward to get into or out of, but if well appointed, smoothly carried, and all grunting, groaning, and shouting on the part of the bearers suppressed, a very comfortable means of conveyance.

We may be sure that Lorimer spared no pains to make the journey easy, and even pleasant, for the gracious lady of the Residency. They drove the first ten miles, after which he rode beside Mrs. Fitzhugh's dooly. Her bearers, the pick of the Oudh professional carriers on the regimental establishments at Mankiala, shuffled along noiselessly at nearly five miles an hour.

Eleven miles from Sherauna the little party halted in a clump of fir-trees. The spot itself was well chosen. No village was near to mar the effect of the refreshing landscape through the

obtrusive presence of groups of dirty children or mangy, half-starved curs with weak, consumptive barks. Beyond the trees was a brooklet, bordered by several flour-mills, worked by water-wheels, on its banks. On the farther side of the little stream were undulating sheets of varying green—for wheat and barley were now some inches high. A tent had been pitched amongst the trees and luncheon prepared in anticipation. The day was delightful, bright and clear, and a cool but gentle breeze was blowing.

The charming landscape, the exhilaration from unfatiguing motion in the open air, the joy of being about to see her husband again, the feeling that she had at last realized that "life is real, life is earnest," and would soon prove by nursing her "noble George"—as she now called him—that she was a devoted and practical wife, and no longer the dreaming transcendentalist of the past, all combined to make that journey an inspiring one for Mary. No wonder then that she appeared fascinating to the young fellows Tombs, Spottiswoode, and Lee, who ran out to meet her dooly and welcome her to Sherauna as the first English lady who had ever visited that *ultima Thule* of British India.

Her cheeks were tinged with unwonted colour and her blue eyes shone with a wonderful limpidity and sparkle, whilst her abundant hair had with unusual waywardness defied the discipline of pins and nets. The fair face of Colonel Fitzhugh's wife, with its slightly ruffled aureole—due to

collisions between her head and the sides and roof of the dooly—appeared to the sentimental boys surrounding her like some rare portrait in a golden frame.

They stood about the dooly whilst she was getting out, each emulous to carry something or do something for her. Would she have tea, or be shown her room, or what?

"I want to see George. May I not go to him at once?" she asked

Tombs said he would run up and tell her husband she had come. She had not been expected for another hour, and he believed the doctor was with his patient. So saying the boy darted off, and finding the said patient awake, alone and expectant, told him of Mrs. Fitzhugh's arrival.

"Let her come up at once," he said, his face flushing.

Tombs looked round the room, closed a window, arranged a chair, and was on the point of leaving, when Colonel Fitzhugh, in an apologetic, shy sort of way, said he would like to have a brush and looking-glass for a minute. The boy, with assumed gravity, handed both to him, and then pretended to occupy himself in wheeling forward and placing a chair and spreading a towel on a low table, to do duty as a tea-cloth. Whilst so engaged he slyly watched the patient, who was now studying his face in the glass, and with the help of the brush improving his personal appearance.

"Anxious to look his best before his wife, like

a girl before her lover," thought Tombs, enjoying the Resident's preparations amazingly.

Having finished his toilet, he let Tombs remove the brush and glass, and naïvely asked how he was looking.

"Awfully well, sir," said the boy, with much internal laughter.

"Don't you think I might get up and receive my wife in that chair?" suggested the pleased patient.

"Shall I ask the doctor?" inquired Tombs.

"No time; you can tell Mary I am ready," he replied; adding *sotto voce*, "A man like me looks such a big baby in bed in the daytime."

Tombs left. A minute or two later the door was softly opened, and Mrs. Fitzhugh entered.

"Mary!" "George!" were the mutual exclamations. She advanced quickly, but showed, by abruptly hesitating at his bedside and neither kissing nor touching him, how shocked she was at his appearance. "My poor George!" were her first words; "how sad to have lost an arm! how thin and pale you are!"

"May I have your hand, Mary?" he asked abruptly, the actual meeting having dispelled the short-lived glamour of expectation.

She gave her hand, and stooping over him, would now have kissed him, but he stopped her, saying, "Not yet, dear, till I know you forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive," she replied simply. "It is, I think, the other way."

He pressed her hand gratefully, raised it to his

lips with reverence, and rubbed the back of it against his cheek ; an action which done gentler might have been a caress, but was, in fact, due to the ebb and flow of a mixture of emotions—joy that it was her hand which he touched, a sort of sensuous pleasure at its soft, warm impact, and the awkwardness he felt in beginning the explanation which he had determined to make.

Presently he shrank away, and looking rather at the ceiling than at her, said, " You don't know what a devil I have been, Mary ; I want to tell you."

" Never mind now, George. That will keep. I have come to nurse you."

" But it must be told," he replied firmly. " Please sit by me and listen to the confession."

She sat down close to him, and put her hand in his again. Her action gave him confidence. Turning his head, he regarded her steadfastly, as an offending dog might his mistress when deprecating wrath and seeking a kind word. Her soft blue eyes rested on his with an intensity of affection which brought home to him her truth and his own baseness. There was a short silence between them, and then his melancholy eyes travelled away from her towards the wall, and he said, with a sigh of despondence, " You were always too good for me, Mary ; and whilst I see you, so near and yet so far, I have not the courage to speak."

" George, George, you don't know me ; don't look away from me. You have always idealized

me, and I have been foolish enough to accept your worship as my due, and to think I had a right to stand on a pedestal—apart from others."

"And so you have," he exclaimed proudly ; "you are apart—aloof—above them all—and I—I do not deserve a loving thought from you."

"Foolish George ! you are blinded indeed," was all that his wife could say.

"Blinded !" he exclaimed, "how little you know ! Are you aware that I gave you an over-dose of morphia that night ?"

"Yes," she answered ; "I had a dreamy suspicion of it at the time : I was very unhappy then. It went through my mind that if I should not wake again I should owe my accidental death to the hand I loved. It pleased me to think so. Morphia gives ease and freedom from care, you know ; and ——"

"But, Mary," he interrupted, speaking with slow conviction, and looking at her with imploring apprehension, "the over-dose was no mistake. I feel sure I meant it."

"What? that I should never wake again?"

"Yes ; that is my secret—that is what I wanted to break to you. Do you hate me now ? I hardly knew what I did—I was mad. We were all so unhappy. I meant you to die loving me, ignorant of all my misdeeds ; and then I rushed out here, intending to get killed, or, failing, to take morphia and die and join you, and my saddest thought was that if I succeeded in getting killed you would never know how I died."

This wild confession was poured out in hot haste, as if he feared that by pausing he should not have the courage to proceed again. When he had ended he raised his eyes to hers, awaiting judgment, miserable, yet hopeful.

To his astonishment, she was all pity, all love, all wonderment. She bent her head down to him and let her lips touch his. "If you meant it," she said, "you did it because you loved me, to end my misery painlessly. I thank God you failed to get killed or take your own life. I heard by letter about the broken phial from Mr. Lorimer."

"Then you forgive me?" he asked in amazement, all gladness now, for more than half his burden had been removed.

"There is nothing to forgive, dear," she replied with quiet conviction.

"But I have not told you all yet," he continued; "I have not told you about Dolly."

"Dear Dolly!" murmured Mary; "the doctor is hopeful."

"I loved her," he said tersely.

"Well, of course you did, and I am glad of it. She saved you from that boy-assassin, and afterwards as good as sacrificed her own life for yours."

"Oh! but you don't understand," he cried bitterly. "I loved her—loved her as a man does a woman. I tempted her, as you know, but she repulsed me, laughed at me, yet was never unkind."

"Hush! George," broke from Mary hurriedly, as she laid her hand on his mouth and gently

caused him to subside on to the pillow. "I won't hear more. I think I know your meaning. All that is over, never to be spoken of or thought of again. You and I were both to blame. That true, devoted girl puts us both to shame. We both owe everything to her, and shall always love her."

"Darling," was all the mean, repentant, bewildered husband could say.

Mary bent over him, and again her lips pressed his, and she whispered to him : "It is my turn to make a confession now. Will you listen and forgive me beforehand ? "

"Yes, yes," he said eagerly. "How I wish I could find some fault in you, something really needing forgiveness. It would help to balance the account."

"Listen, then ; I have sold all the diamonds you ever gave me. There, that is my confession," said his wife, with smiling confidence that the offence would be pardoned.

"For what good purpose, I wonder ? " he asked, with trembling voice, for already the fear was on him that this transgression of hers was but another item which made the gulf between them so immeasurable.

"Well," was the reply, "that clever wretch, Fazl Ali, had cheated you, and got your accounts into a muddle, and Dolly and Mr. Lorimer were trying to collect Rs.20,000 to pay the debts which the Munshi had thrust upon you ; and then there was a deficit in what they called your permanent ad-

vance, whatever that is, and so I helped with my diamonds. They fetched Rs.14,000, I was told."

Colonel Fitzhugh heard the statement in silent amazement, and many things that had been obscure became clear. He had felt doubt and dissatisfaction, and now all was explained. Dolly had avoided him, shut herself up in her room for days to work at his accounts, had ascertained his debts, had traced out the disappearance of Government money from his permanent advance, had taken Mary into her confidence and Lorimer even ; and Mary had surrendered her jewels, and the others had contributed, and between them they had rescued him from all his embarrassments ; he had nothing to fear from the investigation of the special officer whom the Government of India was sending to pry into his pecuniary troubles, and the affairs of the agency generally.

He realized it all now—his own perfidy, the self-sacrificing devotion of the two women, the fact that knowing all they loved him still, and loving him had saved him. All this passed through his mind as he lay there and reviewed the past, his wife's hand in his. Mary waited for him to speak, but no words came from him. On the contrary, he forcibly unclasped her hand, and putting it away, turned his face to the wall.

Mary waited—waited. Why does he not speak ? she wondered. Was he angry that she had disposed of his presents without his permission ? Was he thinking that women had no business to pry into men's affairs ? Had she been wrong in

joining in a sort of conspiracy for his benefit? Well, in any case he was ill, and she was his wife and nurse, and had acted for the best, so she made bold to break the silence,

"George," she said softly, "you are not vexed with me, are you? Our only thought was to help you, and you were so occupied with political business that we decided not to trouble you about money matters. But for that we should have spoken to you, and consulted you before selling the diamonds."

He heard the low, pleading tones of his wife, and his pent-up self-abasement found relief in tears. He turned to her, and in a breaking voice implored her not to torture him. He was so immeasurably unworthy of her that it surpassed understanding how she and Dolly could have been so good to him. Mary was intensely distressed at his breakdown, his tears, his humiliation, and began to upbraid herself for having spoken before he was stronger.

"It was nothing, dear," she protested. "Had I been a good wife to you, and looked after your home as I ought to have done, there would have been no trouble."

"You know all and forgive all!" burst from him passionately. "I can hardly comprehend such goodness."

"We have mutually forgiven each other our mistakes; let us never refer to them again," Mary whispered to him, laying her head on the pillow beside his and putting her hand into his. He

turned to her and kissed her repeatedly, almost passionately, telling her she was his good angel, his saviour, his darling wife, and calling God to witness that from that day henceforth he would devote his life to her service.

Mary heard him, and her heart leapt from joy, and of all the worshipful or endearing terms she had listened to, that of "darling wife" made her most happy. She, too, had entered upon a new life that day, and, by God's grace, would atone for her want of wifeliness in the past, and be a true helpmate to him in the future.

* * * * *

Ten days passed, and still the Fitzhughs remained at Sherauna. The Colonel might have been removed with safety to the Residency the day after his wife's arrival, but he announced he was making such rapid progress where he was that he would not go until his stump was healed and he was able to ride. Mary agreed with him. The news about Dolly was favourable, so, beyond the desire to see her again, there was no obligation for them to hurry back to Mankiala. Another reason for their remaining at Sherauna was that Colonel Fitzhugh was carrying on certain mysterious negotiations with the tribes, particulars about which he divulged to no one except Lorimer, who now had his entire confidence.

At last the date was fixed for the return of the Fitzhughs to the Residency. On the evening preceding their departure they invited all their friends to dine with them in the quondam sick-room,

which had for days now been metamorphosed into a work and sitting-room combined. Mary's presence had done more than drugs for her husband. He was himself again, and more than himself, for he was a new man. Variable moods knew him no more; his evil familiar no longer lay in ambush ready to intrude and contend for victory with the genial, easy-going, good spirit which inhabited him when he was well and happy.

Mary had marked the change, and rejoiced exceedingly, knowing the cause, but had kept her own counsel. Lorimer, too, had noted the change, but had wondered not at all—he ascribed it to Mrs. Fitzhugh's devotion to her husband, and worshipped that queen of women more loyally and absolutely, if that were possible, than before.

It was a bright little function, that farewell dinner. Lorimer had procured flowers from Mankiala, hill friends had sent down from their mountains grasses and dwarf-palm leaves, and Mrs. Fitzhugh and Lorimer in partnership had decorated the table, and draped the walls so tastefully, that when the major commanding, the two captains, the doctor, and the boys, Lee, Spottiswoode, and Tombs, entered, they one and all declared that the room was altered beyond recognition; it was neither hospital, messroom, nor office, but the bower of some fairy princess in an enchanted castle.

Mary sat next to her husband, as she said that, though his combination knife and fork had arrived, he could not use it yet, and she alone knew how

to cut up his meat for him. A little laugh went round the table at this explanation, as every one had noticed that the two were already inseparable. The woman-hating major had in fact confided to one of his captains, some days before, that they were all *de trop*, as the Fitzhughs were evidently honey-mooning over again.

When dinner was over, Colonel Fitzhugh announced that he had one toast to propose before they separated. They accordingly filled their glasses, but did so wondering what the toast could be.

The major winked to his *vis-à-vis*, and whispered to his neighbour, young Tombs, "A gold mohur to a chick (four rupces) I know what it will be."

"Done with you, major," said the boy, who was generally ready to take any bet, and never refused good odds.

"He is going to propose the health of the best nurse in India," said the major, with heavy certainty and a glance at Mrs. Fitzhugh.

"Hardly, major," returned the boy. "Look here, I don't want to take your money. Shall the bet be off?"

"By no means," was the reply.

Just then Colonel Fitzhugh rapped the table for silence, and rose.

"Mary," he said, looking tenderly down on her, "and gentlemen. I stand before you alive and well to-day through the devotion of those who were ready and willing to lay down their lives to

save mine, though I deserved not even kindness from them. Some of their actions can only be acknowledged by me privately, but the last was that of a soldier rendered to me as a soldier. I have reason to believe that his service will be rewarded by the Queen-Empress herself in the form most gratifying to soldiers.

" You all know the story of the fight at the Council Rock, and how my friend Tombs took the command when I fell, and, with the help of a few noble Sikhs, saved my life by his bravery and presence of mind. I have recommended him, my friend Spottiswoode, Subadar-Major Sher Singh, and some of the sepoys, for certain honours ; and in Tombs' case I hope soon to be able to congratulate him as the recipient of the Victoria Cross.

" The toast I propose is that of all brave soldiers, coupled with the names which I have just mentioned."

When the speaker first mentioned Tombs, the boy turned pale, and when he heard he had been recommended for the highest distinction for bravery which can be bestowed, his head swam, and he felt bewildered—indeed, he lost his presence of mind altogether, though he had been cool and collected enough when facing death in the field. He had never speculated even on more than a D.S.O.¹

A shout of applause was the answer to the Colonel's speech.

Before the cheering had subsided Mrs. Fitzhugh,

¹ The Distinguished Service Order.

divining the feelings of the light-hearted but modest boy, who sat there staring before him, white and expressionless from a conflict of emotions, rose from her chair, and, going to him, congratulated him, and thanked him for rescuing her husband. Tombs sprang up from his seat, stammering and blushing, and said something, but neither Mrs. Fitzhugh nor he could ever afterwards recall what it was he did say; and as for the company in general, they asserted that he responded to the toast for brave soldiers by a cowardly attempt to escape from the room. Whatever he did say—if he spoke at all—was probably something utterly commonplace; but the value of words depends on the feelings which call them forth.

When quiet returned, the major solemnly shook hands with Tombs, and said he was glad to lose the bet, but would take it out of him in champagne at his Victoria Cross dinner.

* * * * *

Next morning the Fitzhughs started on their return to Mankiala, and two days after were once more in the Residency.

Chapter XXIX

THE HUMAN HEART

NATURALLY Mrs. Fitzhugh's first visit was to the nursery and then to Dolly's sick room.

Nearly three weeks had passed since that terrible night when the heroic Dolly had been struck down. Her splendid constitution, cheerful temperament, and determination not to die, had all contributed to pull her through the fever and slight attack of pneumonia, which had followed the penetration of her right lung by the bullet. On the night when Colonel Fitzhugh had rushed from the house, brain-tortured into a state of temporary insanity, she had appeared sinking, and Dr. Atherby-Jones, though refusing to give up hope whilst life remained, did not expect her to survive till morning. Towards dawn, instead of dying, she had rallied slightly, and obtained the respite of sleep. On waking, she had taken nourishment, supplemented by a powerful stimulant. A violent fit of coughing ensued, which gradually ceased, leaving the patient exhausted. After that she lay comatose for a time, and her temperature fell.

That fit of coughing had in some unaccountable way improved her chances of recovery, because, although it was followed by chest complications, her vitality never again ebbed to such a low point as that to which it had sunk just before the paroxysm came on.

A few days afterwards, on stethoscoping his patient's chest and sounding her lungs, the doctor's fingers touched the outline of some hard detached substance, which turned out to be the bullet. His theory was that during the convulsion of coughing the bullet had been forced from the lung into the comparatively harmless resting-place in which he had detected its presence. It had probably lodged in the pleura, and worked its way downwards, until finally it had dropped into the intercostal position in which it had been found. Thenceforward the case was one for nursing and maintaining the patient's strength. A professional nurse was procured from Allahabad. She arrived the day before Mrs. Fitzhugh's summons to join her husband, thus releasing that lady from a labour of love, for which, from inexperience and the delicate state of her own health, she was not very well fitted.

By the time of their return Dolly was out of danger, but her affected lung was not clear, and the wound itself was still a cause for some anxiety. Dolly was to be moved for the first time that day into an invalid chair, and to be allowed to sit up for two hours. She heard her cousins drive up, and soon after Mary came to her door and was

admitted. The patient was still in bed, the shadow of her old self; but the bright, indomitable eyes were the same as ever. They welcomed Mary gladly, and Mary, knowing that her cousin was not permitted to speak much yet, sat down beside her, and, having told her all the Sherauna news, began to expatiate on the immense progress observable in her son.

"And, Dolly," proceeded her cousin, "I have good news for you. Dr. Atherby-Jones says he hopes that to-morrow, if no change in the weather takes place, you may have a drive; that means convalescence."

The information was new to Dolly, but caused her no happiness. Her face crinkled into a sad little smile, and her lips attempted to form the words, "How nice that will be!" but in her heart of hearts she was sorry. She knew that for her recovery would be the beginning of the end. It was already the second week in March, and flight to Simla or home could not be long delayed. The thought of the impending break-up filled her with dismay.

"You don't seem over-pleased to know how nearly well you are," Mary remarked, noticing her cousin's dejection.

"Being well means going away; it made me sorry, for George will be alone," Dolly explained in an unsteady voice.

It was the longest speech she had made since Mary had been sitting with her, for she was reserving all her strength for George.

"Cheer up, dear," said Mary encouragingly, "nothing can be settled till you are better; and as for separation, I doubt it. I think we shall all want change this hot weather. George cannot get on without me now."

That news brightened Dolly. She regarded Mary closely, and noticed a change—her old dreamy spirituality was replaced by a look of wifely contentment, which could not be mistaken. Dolly understood, and was unselfishly glad for both their sakes.

"Is George—different, dear?" she inquired, without clearly comprehending what she meant.

"What a question!" exclaimed Mary, glowing with self-consciousness. "I know I am what you call 'different,' for I am happy; but as for George, ask him yourself."

Whilst the cousins were together, George was in his office-room occupied with affairs of State. He had left Lorimer at Sherauna to carry out his orders in respect of the mysterious negotiations which he had been conducting with his late enemies. Upon his return to head-quarters his old friend, Sir Atwell Pottinger, sent over to know when he would be at leisure, and having received his reply, went at once to the Residency. After condoling with Colonel Fitzhugh on the loss of an arm, and declaring that the conception and execution of the surprise of the enemy at the Council Rock was a brilliant affair, of which the army was

proud, the veteran stopped abruptly and then added, "But it was not sound business, eh?"

"Why?" asked the Resident, smiling blandly, for he knew a good deal more than his critic.

"Why? you ran a grave risk of annihilation," the General announced in his most impressive style; "and even if successful, as you were, you could hardly expect to influence results."

"As for the risk," returned the rash offender placidly, "you know the saying about the omelette and the eggs; and as for results, I am satisfied."

"I cannot say I am," snapped the General, the political's superior manner annoying him. "As soon as the news was confirmed I wired to Calcutta that your action would involve all the hill tribes against us,—might, in fact, set the frontier in a blaze, from Gilgit to Quetta,—and that instead of three Brigades, I should require six, with Divisional troops besides.

"And what was the decision of Government?"

"They demurred," Sir Atwell replied, "went back on their original order, and only directed the mobilization of two Brigades."

"Why was that?"

"The reason assigned," the General replied hotly, nettled at being cornered, "was that if an army, not a mere punitive force, were required, it would be better to give the tribes an ultimatum, and full opportunity to discuss it and come to a decision, and then attack them, if necessary, at harvest-time. Except their one summer crop, and

their towers and mud hovels, they possess nothing destructible by an invading force. They would remove their flocks and herds beyond our reach, you know."

"I think the Government decision was sound."

"How so?" asked the General, with increased irritation.

"Unless we can strike a decisive blow immediately an outrage occurs, there can never be any object in hurry, and in that case the more deliberation the greater the chance of avoiding actual war. The expense of a big expedition, such as is now the vogue, is ruinous and disturbing to the minds of the Punjabis. The revenues of India cannot stand these constant frontier wars, and the people are weary of the consequent impressment, and growing restive. They will not submit to more squeezing to pay for these 'little wars,' so the money has to be found for them by borrowing, and starving the civil administration."

This oracular pronouncement angered the General. It was too sound to be controverted, but it was also at variance with the supposed sentiments of the Resident himself, who had hitherto been classed by his military friends as a frontier-jingo and friend of the soldier.

"Is Saul amongst the prophets, eh?" spluttered Sir Atwell. "You—you—never held these extraordinary views before. If the Pechistanis do accept the ultimatum, there will be no campaign, and—and no —"

"Shower of honours for the soldier-man ; but a saving of a million sterling or more for the Indian taxpayers," said the Resident sarcastically, finishing the sentence in a way by no means pleasing to his exasperated friend.

"Well, I am a soldier, and say, 'D—n expense !' What is more, I never expected such a *volte face* from you," was all the poor General could utter, as he sat back in his chair, blinking at the Resident in utter bewilderment.

"I think you have mistaken my views," was Colonel Fitzhugh's quiet rejoinder. "I have, I believe, always consistently advocated the necessity of punishing all tribal offences with exemplary severity quickly, when possible with the troops at hand ; otherwise, failing complete submission without war, deliberately, with a crushing force and in a crushing manner."

"And I suppose you think your dare-devil exploit will prove enough ?" scoffed the General.

"Well, I know what the ultimatum is," the Resident observed with dignity :—"the surrender of twenty men named unconditionally, except that they would not be hanged, and the razing to the ground of Maizar, with all its towers and hamlets—not a hovel even to be left standing."

"And will hill-men ever surrender their chiefs or their priests, do you think ?" roared Sir Atwell, feeling that his triumph was coming ; and after a pause adding, "I know them better than you ; they never will, eh ?"

"Of the twenty men named," continued the

Resident, ignoring the challenge, "thirteen were killed at the Council Rock fight, the other seven will to-day be delivered to Lorimer at Sherauna ; and as for the destruction of Maizar, I have arranged to have it carried out as soon as I am supplied with the necessary number of sappers and a small escort of, say, five hundred men, to enable us to extricate ourselves in the unlikely event of treachery or opposition."

This statement was made in a sober, business-like manner, as if the speaker took no credit to himself for bringing about such an astounding reversal of the teachings of history.

Sir Atwell stared. Could this be the same Fitzhugh he had known for goodness knows how many years, the man who had almost made a hopeless bungle of his private affairs, and had fallen the easiest of dupes to the wiles of the crafty Fazl Ali ?

The hot-tempered General began to perceive that some great change had taken place in his friend's character. He was now neither fire-eater nor expedition-maker, nor a shaper of events to suit his own aspirations. He had evidently gone out to Sherauna with the preconceived determination to strike a blow and so avert a hill-campaign ; and, yes, by Jove ! he had succeeded too.

Ever precipitate, and though prone to wrath, yet readier for concord and friendship, Sir Atwell impulsively rose from his seat and grasped his friend by the hand. " You are right," he said heartily ; " you have a longer head than I gave you credit

for, and, after all, know those hill-beggars better than I do. You are a fine fellow, Fitzhugh, and I congratulate you. If you destroy Maizar, as you propose, without an army at your back, the Government cannot be too grateful."

"And the escort and the sappers?" the Resident queried.

"Will be sent out at once to be ready, and tons of dynamite also," was the reply—the old man did nothing by halves.

Then the two friends chatted over the fight, and the veteran soldier's heart warmed at the account of the splendid gallantry of young Tombs, Sher Singh and his Sikhs, and the tactical ability and readiness of Spottiswoode. At the mention of Fazl Ali and his awful death the General fell to moralising.

"So Mr. Yellow-Face is gone to his last account, leaving yours unsettled, eh? Ha! ha! ha! do you follow? The moment I saw him I knew he would come to a bad end. I never make a mistake in reading a native, do I?"

"No, never," the Resident admitted. At the time he would have agreed with the old man had he asserted he could see through the biggest ruffian on the frontier.

Just then a pencil note was put into Colonel Fitzhugh's hand from his wife, saying Dolly was getting up for the first time, and would receive him in half an hour, as soon as comfortably settled in a chair! He read it to the General, whose comment was, "Well, I suppose that is to remind you I have

kept you here long enough, so I'll be off. But, Fitzhugh, you are a lucky fellow to have two such noble women devoted to you."

After that Sir Atwell went back to his bungalow, leaving a message for Mrs. Fitzhugh that he would call and pay his respects in the afternoon about five.

Colonel Fitzhugh saw him mount his pony, and then, with a light heart, went in search of his wife, and found her in the nursery, playing with her boy. He joined in the game, but Mary soon ordered him away to his room, to make himself presentable for his interview with Dolly.

That young person's toilet must have taken a long time, for George did not receive his summons for quite an hour after he had left the day-nursery. However, at last a salaam was received, and a minute afterwards he once more stood in the room of the woman who had been more to him than his wife, and even now was half his soul to him.

As he opened the door and saw Dolly seated there near the window, whence she could gladden her eyes by the sight of green fields and trees, with the rich play of sunshine upon them, the incidents of his last visit flashed through his mind—his despair, his madness, the corpse-like figure on the bed, his prayer and last farewell. Now all was different: he was hopeful, he was happy, his monetary troubles had passed away, and Dolly would soon be the Dolly of old—the bright, affectionate, fearless girl to whom he owed everything.

As he closed the door behind him she turned her head at the sound and, smiling welcome, held out her hand. He hastened forward and pressed it to his lips. Not a word had yet been spoken. They both gazed intently on each other, taking in each other's physical changes and instinctively reading each other's minds.

"Are you sorry?" she queried presently, touching the armless sleeve.

"No, dear," he answered; "it has helped me to many things—to Mary, to a new view of life."

Dolly heard and pondered. Was he telling the permanent truth? or were his feelings merely chastened for a time, because he had suffered and his bodily vigour had temporarily waned?

"Am I much altered, George?" she asked doubtingly, wondering whether loss of health and looks would affect his feelings.

"You are thin, and the shadow of the girl I knew," he answered, after viewing her critically, more as a make-believe than because he wished to see her better.

"Is that all?" she inquired, a little disappointed.

"No," he replied hurriedly, realizing his mistake; "you are more lovely than ever: so ethereal, so pure. Why, you look like a good angel resting for an hour or two on earth before returning there," and he pointed outwards and upwards.

She smiled at the comparison, but it pleased her. She stroked his thin muscular hand with her wasted fingers, and said, "I am not a good angel.

If I get strong again, I know I shall be as wild and wayward as ever I was."

" May that be soon," he said fervently.

" What ! you want me to be wild again ? Oh, George !" she exclaimed.

" No ; strong again, I meant," he explained. " I was brute enough to try and make you—well, wicked ; but I did not succeed, thank God ! "

She looked at him naïvely and laughed softly to herself. Then she thrust away from her the thoughts caused by his remark, and said with decision, " We have done with all that—we two maimed creatures ; besides, you have Mary now."

" Yes, I know," he acquiesced, distressed that she should think him capable of backsliding.

" I am glad you love Mary now," she persisted ; " it makes it easier for me. I shall have no fear of you when I am well."

He looked down at his empty sleeve, but said nothing. She understood, and to tease him remarked with pretended uneasiness, " Yes, in any case I could defy you—two strong arms against one. When we walk together I'll keep on your helpless side."

" It is my left, and my heart would draw you," he laughed defiantly ; adding, " Come now, you are just as fond of me as ever, Dolly."

" I am, I am, God help me ! though I know it is wrong," she whispered, with moistened eyes.

" Dolly ! my Dolly !" broke from him tenderly, and he kissed her.

She put his face away from her, saying, " There,

never again ; I only wanted to make sure you care for me still."

" It was a brotherly kiss of pure affection," he protested ; and he believed he spoke the truth.

" So be it," she said with firmness, " but it is the last. Mary loves you now, and I shall never come between you two again. It was different formerly."

George said nothing. He pondered in his stupid way over the enigma of a good woman's nature. It was a sealed mystery to him, as to most men. He knew Dolly meant what she said, and in his heart of hearts was glad. He wished to be wholly Mary's, yet he knew he was weak, and could not resist temptation, and he foresaw that when Dolly recovered and flashed forth again as the winsome, provoking, passion-compelling girl she had been, he would be lost, body and soul, were she not strong. Dolly knew all this as well as he did, but as she loved the man, regarded him in a sense as her own property, and could trust herself, she enjoyed her power over him, that was all.

She broke the silence by telling him that in a few minutes Miss Maynard, her nurse, would be coming in with tea, and would insist on his leaving.

" Why ? is she a tyrant ? "

" No ; but she is a dear, stiff old Gorgon, and dislikes men about her lady patients. Be quick, as time is short, and tell me your plans for the hot weather."

" They depend on you," he answered ; " we shall not even discuss them until Doctor Jones says you are fit to travel."

"What an important personage I have become!" laughed Dolly with satisfaction.

"Naturally—the all-important personage for me."

"I intend to be well this week, if this is Tuesday."

"No; it is Monday only," he stated.

"Then I promise to be well on Friday without fail," was her announcement, made with a touch of her old, joyous decidedness.

"I shall exist on hope till Friday then, though it's poor diet," said George gallantly.

"Now that Mary and you are here I shan't stay in bed any longer," added Dolly, continuing her announcement.

"I'll drive you in the mail phæton once more—think of that!" he murmured sentimentally, his mind travelling back to their first long drive together.

"I'll watch you and Mary honeymooning—think of that!" remarked Dolly mischievously.

He looked at her, reproach in his eyes, and said with intense seriousness, "I can only be your debtor, and you know it, so you may ridicule me, trample on me, dismiss me, forget me, and it will make no difference."

"And what if I marry?" she asked, impelled by some sudden impulse of waywardness.

"I should forbid the banns unless the man were worthy; and if he were, I should pray for your happiness, and whilst always your debtor, be yet your brother."

"You mean it, I know," she whispered, intensely moved by the depth of his devotion ; "in future we shall be as brother and sister."

Just then the carriage clock on the mantelpiece struck six, and Nurse Maynard entered, followed by an attendant with tea. Miss Maynard, by habit, immediately took stock of her patient : face flushed, eyes glistening, manner vivacious ; so she concluded that the pair were interested in each other, and must have talked too much. She put her hand to Dolly's brow, it was cool ; she felt the pulse, it was strong and regular. All then was well, and the Resident's long visit had done no harm.

"You may stay and have tea with Miss Carew, if you like," the nurse intimated, not very graciously — a privilege which the minute before she had had no intention of conceding on any terms, her experience being that men were disturbing factors for her lady patients generally, and pretty girls in particular.

Dolly watched George speculatively, wanting him to stay, yet feeling he had been with her long enough. She saw his irresolution, and knew he would yield to his inclination, as man always does. Quickly interposing, her powers of invention came to her aid, and she said, "You promised to join Mary at six, so good-bye for to-day."

He rose at once, and having gravely shaken hands with her, turned to Miss Maynard and thanked her for the invitation, hoped she would repeat it next afternoon, he was afraid he had

already overtaxed her patient, and then with a good-bye to both left the room.

"I like Colonel Fitzhugh," was Miss Maynard's outspoken comment to her charge as the two were taking tea together ; " his manners are pleasant, and he had the discretion to go without being ordered."

" You are right, he is a good sort," Dolly agreed, with a yawn. She would not wear her heart on her sleeve, not she ; and she thought that Miss Maynard had been suspiciously observant.

Her dissembling was admirably acted, and Nurse Maynard concluded that her patient was really indifferent.

" You ought to think more of Colonel Fitzhugh than that, after twice saving his life," she remarked in candid rebuke.

" Perhaps I do, nurse ; but, unfortunately, he is married, so I put Satan behind me," Dolly explained with mock seriousness.

Austere Miss Maynard looked scandalized ; whereupon Dolly added plaintively, knowing the lady's weak point, " I want more tea, please. I am so tired, and a cup of tea is nicer than any man."

" My poor child ! of course you are tired after talking for an hour." And forthwith the patient had her second cup, and Miss Maynard, occupied with her duties, left the girl to her own thoughts undisturbed.

After tea she was put to bed, and then Mary came and read to her. But somehow nearly every sentence reminded the reader of something George had said or done ; so the gracious lady of the

Residency talked proudly of her husband, and the heroic maiden of the dagger and bullet was nothing loath to listen.

By degrees Mary's low, pleasing voice sounded distant and more distant, till Dolly was in dreamland, walking through a flowerful meadow with a lover, and listening at her peril to his wooing; now he spoke glowingly of his love, of the miserable monotony of his existence until she had brightened it, and his words and manner were masterful, passionate. She listened, and her heart beat faster—faster, and she felt she was yielding—yielding. To do so was wrong, she knew, for he was married, yet her being clave to him. Then a sweet, pure, trusting face came between them, and gazed at her sorrowfully, reproachfully, and she fled from the bold wooer.

She pitied herself, and ran swiftly alone through that flowery meadow. Out of breath, she stopped, and, lo! she was joined by another. He spoke humbly and pleadingly, and gradually his powers of gentle persuasion appealed to her: he was unworthy of her regard, he said, and deserved a curt dismissal, but he would not leave her this time under a mistake, as before.

"As before?" she inquired, for surely the voice and figure were familiar, and both had once pleased her, but the face was hidden, as it often is in dreamland.

"Yes, as before. Do you not remember a long drive in a mail phæton?" he asked, with timid reproach.

"I recall several," she answered, crimsoning from conflicting memories.

"But one in particular," he urged, "when we said unkind words to each other, and parted in hasty anger!"

Then the past all rushed in upon her mind—her quiet country home in Yorkshire, Jack's exacting ways, his pretty cousin, her jealousy, the silver-tongued curate, the quarrel; so she trembled exceedingly, and answered slowly, "Yes, I remember."

"And you cared for me then?" he inquired eagerly.

"I thought so then."

"And now?"

There was no answer, for she woke at that instant with a start, as Mary had let her book fall.

"Mary," she said, with a fluttering heart, "is there any one else in the room?"

"No, dear; why?"

"I have been walking with Jack," she answered softly; "and he pretends it was a mistake, and is sorry. But he did not convince me, and I don't think I can like him now."

"You little goose!" cried Mary, kissing her.

The girl turned and lay on her left side. Mary waited. There was no sound. Then she quietly went away, wondering within herself if Dolly's dream would come true. She told George about it, and he laughed a little sardonically, Mary thought, and said, "If Jack Hargraves does turn up I shall believe in the proverb about coming events; but he won't, he is a cur."

Chapter XXX

MATCH-MAKING AND MARRING

A WEEK passed. The seven surviving head-men implicated in the Maizar outrage had been surrendered and deported ; the hitherto inviolate Maizar itself had been razed to the ground, its towers blown up, its groves cut down, its water-mills and even its houses destroyed—in short, had been metamorphosed from the oldest, strongest, largest, richest, and most picturesque fortified village in the Pechistani hills into an abomination of desolation ; and the work of vengeance had been carried out by a few sappers and a handful of sepoys in the presence of some thousands of hill-men.

In the neighbourhood of Maizar only two localities and a few buildings had been left untouched—the cemetery, the mosques, and the shrine and grave of the saint buried at the Council Rock. As to the shrine, it had already lost its sanctity, the blood spilt there having desecrated it. Thus by the irony of fate the whirligig of time brought rest, and peace, and revenge to the spirit of the murdered Sayad buried there.

When the business of destruction had been completed, as Lorimer and a group of R.E. officers gazed on their handiwork, one and all felt that in the annals of frontier outrages and acts of retribution such a lasting lesson had never before been inflicted on a hill tribe, and the cost to Government had been a few thousand rupees, instead of the usual fifty or more lakhs. The "*Ameer Sahib's revenge*," as the people called it, was noised abroad amongst the mountains, and brought home to all the wild-men of the hills how swiftly and sternly the Sarkar could retaliate when so willed, and how helpless they were when the Sarkar was roused to serious anger, and departed from the old rule of rose-water punishment.

The Government of India and the Indian and Home Press now handsomely admitted that the otherwise unaccountable submission of the Pechistanis must be attributed to the effect upon them of Colonel Fitzhugh's desperate feat of arms. Curiously enough, whilst lauding him as an able warden of the marches and fearless strategist and commander, both Government and Press pointed out that the risk run in such "raids"—as his incursion was called—was great, and that consequently this remarkable and entirely successful foray could not be accepted as a precedent or encouragement for attempts at repetitions. On the contrary, its unexpected and almost inexplicable results demonstrated that the established practice of Government was the only safe policy

to pursue—namely, that when the employment of force was necessary the number of the expeditionary troops should be so large as to render organized opposition impossible. The only objection to the system was, Government observed, its enormous expensiveness. On the other hand, as it tested mobilization arrangements, and operated as a camp of exercise on service conditions, the money was in the opinion of Government well spent.

Discussing these views with Lorimer, the Resident remarked with a contemptuous shrug, "They are perfectly sound if neither money nor punishment is an object."

"Is that sarcasm, sir?" the boy asked.

"No, it's truth," the Resident replied bitterly. "I have drawn the teeth of our hill friends for a decade at least, and saved Government a million sterling, and I get no thanks."

"Naturally," returned Lorimer. "You have obstructed the honour-stream, so military interests are sore; and as Government take account of coppers, but not of lakhs, why should they thank you for saving the latter?"

"You are getting cynical," his chief laughed; "you had better go and work off your ill-humour."

"There is nothing for me to do," objected Lorimer. "Since those priests, the root of all evil, were shot, border offences have ceased."

"You can write a report, surely?"

"Certainly, if you select a subject."

"Well, look down our long list of unanswered references and choose one. Reports are overdue on higher education, technical schools for hill-men's children, the refusal of agriculturists to try Beheia sugar-presses or Empress of India ploughs, the loss of a rupee from a Government Treasury bag, and fifty other subjects. Since Fazl Ali's death I have no one to write my reports for me."

After Lorimer's departure Colonel Fitzhugh resumed his despatch on his final settlement with the tribes, and had scribbled hard for an hour or more when a card was brought in to him. As he took no notice, but continued his writing, the orderly placed the card on the office table and waited in disciplined silence. Presently his master looked up, and seeing him standing there remarked impatiently, "Well, what is it ? "

"The *Sahib* is waiting," the orderly explained.

"Show him in here," was the order.

A stranger entered, and the Resident, perceiving he was a gentleman, shook hands with him. Whilst looking about unsuccessfully for his visitor's card, Colonel Fitzhugh took stock of him. "About 30, tall, spare, nondescript features, clean-shaven, seems presentable," said the Resident to himself ; "a lawyer, I should say—Great Scot ! of course the special officer deputed by the Government of India to go into my accounts and Fazl Ali's charges."

Under that impression Colonel Fitzhugh decided that it did not behove him to open the conversation. He consequently waited to be addressed, and continuing his observations, saw that his caller

appeared in poor health, and put the fact down to a sedentary life in the detestable Calcutta climate.

"I should have arrived here some time ago," the stranger remarked, with a deprecatory cough; "unfortunately, I got malarial fever at Delhi, and that delayed me."

"Yes; I expected you about three weeks ago."

"Indeed! That is strange, as I purposely did not write, from fear of causing annoyance—I thought it best not to prepare any one for my visit."

"That was very considerate of you," Colonel Fitzhugh replied, already kindly disposed to him on account of his evident delicacy of feeling.

"Well, it is good of you to take it so," the caller said. "You see, I could hardly anticipate how I should be received."

"There is something in that," the Resident remarked after reflection, gazing the while inscrutably at a fly on the ceiling-cloth and thinking how very diffident this official inquisitor was.

"I might, you see, have come too late," continued the said inquisitor.

"You are, in fact, too late, I regret for your sake to have to inform you," the Resident said, smiling blandly, almost sorry to disappoint a man who had travelled 2,000 miles, and suffered malarial fever all for nothing, and he such a thorough gentleman too, and so obviously uncomfortable at the odious duty which had been thrust upon him.

"Too late?" the inquisitor echoed in melancholy surprise, staring at the Resident, but presently,

feeling that his eyes were growing watery, he turned away his head and used his handkerchief.

"Yes ; by about three weeks," Colonel Fitzhugh explained, beginning to think that his soft-hearted caller could not have recovered from the effects of his fever.

"How extraordinary ! There was no announcement in the *Pioneer*," exclaimed the younger man. "Do you mean to tell me—that—the—person is dead ? "

"Yes ; I have just stated the fact—three weeks ago," said the Resident, now convinced that the man's brain was affected.

"I'll return at once. There is nothing left for me to do," said the supposed lunatic, with difficulty restraining his tears.

"You might care to go through the accounts of the case ? " suggested the Resident.

"Quite unnecessary, sir ; death closes all accounts," the other remarked mournfully.

"Yes, amongst friends perhaps, but not between Government and their officers," Colonel Fitzhugh muttered *sotto voce*.

The visitor rose, but before going a thought occurred to him. He regarded Colonel Fitzhugh doubtfully, and then with some hesitation asked, "Would it be a trouble to you to let me have a guide to the grave ? "

The Resident stared. "The man must have become a monomaniac," he thought. "His mind has been dwelling on the one subject for weeks all through his illness ; that explains it."

"The body is not here, but in the hills ; and I rather think it was not buried," Colonel Fitzhugh explained in a low voice, to break the news as quietly as possible.

It was now the supposed lunatic's turn to open his eyes in amazement, and think the Resident was mad ; but he was too polite to hint his thoughts, and was turning to leave, when it occurred to Colonel Fitzhugh that he might as well know the name of this extraordinary emissary from the Government of India.

"Excuse me," he said apologetically, "but the orderly must have dropped or misplaced your card. This table is so littered with papers that the card has got lost amongst them. The fact is that since the person in whom you are so interested went away I have no one to keep my papers in order."

The caller heard this extraordinary announcement to the end, muttered to himself, "Person," "Keep papers in order," and then a gleam of hope brightened his depression as he exclaimed hurriedly, "Can we be at cross-purposes, I wonder ? My name is Hargraves."

"What ! Jack Hargraves ?" roared Colonel Fitzhugh, galvanized from his chair to his feet.

"Yes, that is my name."

"Great Scot ! what an absurd mistake !" said the Resident, gripping Jack Hargraves by the hand and shaking it warmly ; "I am delighted to make your acquaintance."

"Then Miss Carew is not dead ?"

"No ; she is nearly convalescent."

"Thank God for that!" burst from Mr. Hargraves—a *Te Deum* uttered fervently with a tremor in the voice and a trembling in the legs, which caused the thanksgiver to lean heavily against the table.

"Sit down, and I'll get you a pick-me-up. I am not surprised at your being knocked over," said the Resident, as he wheeled the easy chair forward and induced Mr. Hargraves to subside into it. He then called to the orderly to have a whisky-and-soda brought at once. When the peg had been drunk the cause of the mistake was explained, and the two men laughed over its absurdity.

"Don't let Dolly know I mistook you for a Judge or Accountant-General, and her for Fazl Ali," Colonel Fitzhugh implored, with comical anguish.

"I may have no opportunity of telling her, even if I wished to do so," Mr. Hargraves replied lugubriously, for he was very frightened of Miss Dolly, and took all the blame of their quarrel and separation on himself.

"Faint heart, you know the rest, so cheer up," the Resident observed encouragingly, but he spoilt the solatium by adding, "Dolly is a trump, and you can't be as fond of her as I am, or you would not have loafed in South Africa these four or five months."

"That is the reason Miss Carew may not forgive me," Mr. Hargraves explained, his hopes at zero.

"Nonsense! To forgive is part of a good woman's goodness."

"Perhaps," echoed the other pensively, "she may do so, and yet refuse me her love."

"I can offer no opinion about that," said the Resident grandly; and, indeed, he had serious misgivings, as well he might, that Dolly would never give the young man her heart.

After some further conversation, Colonel Fitzhugh pressed Mr. Hargraves to send for his things, and put up at the Residency, but the hospitable offer was declined; he would not even accept an invitation to dinner unless convinced that Miss Carew would approve of his presence. He said he would write an explanation about their unfortunate misunderstanding, and if the Resident or Mrs. Fitzhugh would convey the news of his arrival to the invalid before giving her the letter, he would be grateful. He then returned to the place where he was staying—the *dak* bungalow, a sort of Government inn, maintained at stations and stages in which there is no other accommodation suitable for travellers.

When the letter was received, Colonel Fitzhugh took it to his wife, and told her, with some detail, that Dolly's absconded lover had arrived, and was anxious to make his peace with his late *fiancée*.

"Then her dream has come true," exclaimed Mary in delight. "Dear Dolly will no longer be a waif."

"She can never be that whilst I live," said George with energy, repudiating the inference attachable to the word "waif."

"Why do you take me up so?" protested his

wife, with mild displeasure. "I only meant to imply she would soon have a legal protector."

"A husband, you mean," said George. "I am not so sure of that, as I expect she will refuse him."

"How little you understand a young girl's heart, my dear!" commented Mary, in her occasionally superior way.

"I have such small experience, you know," acquiesced George, in great good-humour.

"His constancy will appeal to her," asserted the wife.

"Doubtless, as proved by his flight to Johannesburg," remarked the husband imperturbably.

"His rushing away from the goldfields and journey here in search of her will touch Dolly's heart," continued the wife, with warming imagination.

"Certainly," the husband agreed, nodding his head in ironical assent; "but remember he forgot her for four or five months, whilst he was making his pile."

"You know Dolly came here to hide from him," persisted Mary; "so how could he have discovered where she was?"

"Through the P. and O., or a private inquiry office," returned George doggedly.

"How provoking you are!" exclaimed his wife, with a show of temper which delighted George; "one might suppose you are jealous of Mr. Hargraves."

"I hope not," he answered dubiously, for the

question made him realize that he had been mean enough not to like the thought of Dolly having a lawful lover.

"Then," said Mary, "I hope you will do your best to make Dolly happy; and I am sure nothing but a good husband will do that."

"How can I make her a good husband without committing bigamy?" George asked, in pretended perplexity.

"You goose!" Mary laughed. "Tell her Mr. Hargraves is a splendid fellow, is devoted to her, and that you would like to stand in his shoes."

"If he marries her I am sure I should like to do that," agreed George, with unblushing effrontery.

"You are incorrigible, sir!" said Mary, flushing, though herself inclined to laugh.

"Go, dear, and deliver the *billet doux*," George urged, serious at last. "I promise you to help on the match, provided that Dolly likes him well enough."

Mary went to her cousin, who was now sufficiently convalescent to rest on a couch in the boudoir or drawing-room, and sometimes sit in the garden in the cool of the afternoon.

Dolly heard the news with outward composure, though her heightened colour showed that it had agitated her.

"Give me the letter," she said, holding out her hand.

When she got it, and had glanced at the address, she remarked, "Yes, it is Mr. Hargraves' writing."

"Mr. Hargraves!" echoed Mary, her enthusiasm damped; "why, how cold you are! I thought he was Jack."

"I called him Jack at home, under different circumstances," the girl observed gravely.

"Would you like him asked to dinner?" Mary inquired with hesitation.

"Then he is not already stopping here?"

"No; George asked him, but he declined, as you might not like it."

Dolly's hard look relaxed, and she smiled, saying, "That was considerate of him, any way"; and then, recollecting her dignity, she added, "By all means ask him to dinner; but I shall not sit up to-night. I am tired."

"Would you like him to stop here?" inquired Mary insinuatingly.

"I am not hostess," was the freezing reply.

Mary heard, and was astonished. Dolly was actually snubbing her. Well, George was right, after all—clever George! What remarkable intuition he had shown in gauging the effect of Mr. Hargraves' arrival on the girl! Whereas she, his wife, who ought to know the feelings of her own sex in such matters, had been all wrong, too sanguine, and even precipitate. It would, however, come right in time, and, of course, Dolly could not tell the nature of her lover's explanation until she had read his letter. Mary's sweet reasonableness made it almost impossible for her to show temper.

"I am going, dear," she said sympathetically.

"Of course, he shan't come near the house until it pleases you."

Dolly at the moment was pensively twisting the unopened letter about in her hands, trouble and perplexity on her face. The concession softened her. She turned to her cousin, and realizing her own crossness and Mary's sweetness, held out her hands. Mary flew to her, and the girl laid her head on her cousin's shoulder, and her eyes filled with tears.

"You don't know, you can't know; but it is all so difficult," she moaned.

"What is difficult, dear?"

"His coming here—now," the girl answered, lowering her voice to a whisper at the last word.

"I am sure it is very good of him to come so far. It shows he cares for you very much. You were going to marry him, you know."

At the word "marry" Mary felt the girl shiver, and the tears flowed afresh. Mary waited, caressing the pretty head on her shoulder. Presently Dolly said, "That was all so long ago."

"It was only a few months ago," asserted Mary.

"But I have lived in those months," said Dolly, with simple truth. "I was a girl then, I am a woman now, and I know."

"Well, dear, if his presence annoys you, it is easy for George to tell him to go," observed Mary, playing the diplomatist.

"That would be too cruel on him," Dolly objected. "He would think me unforgiving, and I am not that, and—and, after all, I am fond of Jack."

"George says he is such a nice fellow," put in Mary, continuing her *rôle*.

"I like Jack; but he is only a boy," said Dolly qualifying her previous admission.

"Yes, dear?" said Mary interrogatively;—adding to herself, "The boy is thirty, at least."

"But I like George better; he is a man," announced Dolly, completing and correcting her confession.

Mary pricked up her ears at such differentiation and remembered certain things; but again her sweet reasonableness prevailed, and again diplomacy helped her.

"Of course you prefer George," she acquiesced "so do I; but he is old enough to be your father, child."

"Is he? I never thought of that."

"And then he has a wife already," continued Mary, pursuing her advantage.

Dolly laughed through her tears, in spite of the emotions within her, and admitted that a wife was an awkward factor in the case.

"Tell me, child," asked Mary mercilessly, "when does a boy become a man?"

"You are quizzing me; I won't be made fun of!" cried Dolly indignantly, feeling that Mary was trying to turn her tragedy into a comedy.

"Very well, dear, I'll go and leave you to read your letter," said Mary, rising; "and I shall not ask Mr. Hargraves to dinner, though he will only get tough fowl at the *dāk* bungalow, and he has been very ill."

"Poor Jack! you never told me before he had been ill," said Dolly pityingly.

"Yes; he had malarial fever at Delhi, and nearly died, and all on your account; and I should not wonder if the mail-cart journey here and bad food at that horrid Government bungalow were to give him a relapse, or bring on enteric fever. The milk at that place is watered, and must be full of microbes, and George said he nearly fainted in the office-room."

Mary had piled it on, and told her harrowing tale glibly enough, and was never afterwards sure to what extent invention was mingled with fact.

Dolly listened and relented. "Do ask him to put up with us," she said; "I cannot bear to think of him being alone in that stuffy *dâk* bungalow, with bad food and bad milk. And—and—tell him I'll read his letter, and see him afterwards sometime."

Mary departed gratified, almost elated, to carry out Dolly's requests; and when she told her husband of all that had passed—omitting, of course, a few of Dolly's and her own speeches—he said, "You are a clever woman, quite a finished diplomatist. I begin to think Dolly will marry him some day from pity, and a month afterwards love him. It is the way of the sex, you know."

"I don't know, George, and I can't believe it; I am sure I should never do such a thing," declared Mary, her fighting spirit roused.

"Ah, dear, but you are different from all other women," rejoined George, and with that his wife was mollified—nay, more, completely satisfied.

Match-making develops a woman wonderfully ; but not so much as a love affair, particularly if it ends unhappily. Mary's qualified success with her cousin delighted her, she had won the first moves and gained a strong position : it would be her own fault if she did not improve it ; she would play a cautious, yet strong game now, and push home her attack. She had gained insight into the girl's heart. It was a tender heart, easily moved to pity, and pity was akin to love. Why should not the citadel be stormed and captured that very afternoon ? She laid her plans accordingly. Mr. Hargraves' letter would move Dolly. He would take the whole blame of the quarrel and subsequent estrangement on himself, and throw himself on her mercy ; and she, not to be outdone in magnanimity, would be anxious to atone for her share in the foolish misunderstanding which had separated them, would forgive him, and if whilst the yielding mood was on her he pressed his suit, the engagement might be renewed that evening—why not that afternoon ?

So the match-maker conceived a little plot : George and she would be out that afternoon, and Mr. Hargraves on arrival would be shown into her boudoir, and find Dolly there alone. Then *tableau* ! mutual surprise, forgiveness, kissing, happiness for both, and Mary would suddenly appear like a fairy godmother, and give the young people her blessing.

Mrs. Fitzhugh confided nothing to George ; it was not an affair for a middle-aged, matter-of-fact

husband to meddle in. So she wrote to Mr. Har-graves, and, using Dolly's name, invited him to move over to the Residency, and suggested that he should arrive about afternoon tea-time, and join them in her boudoir ; even should she be a little late in getting home from a business call she had to make, he would find tea ready for him at five o'clock.

The plotter next informed George that she required him to come with her to the local photographer at half-past four that afternoon, as she had made an appointment to have a family group taken at five.

"A family group, dear ? that is rather a large order," he demurred, wondering what the little game was.

"Not large, only three of us—you, I, and Alan."

"What ! not Dolly also ?" he inquired, his suspicions aroused.

"She is hardly one of the family, George," Mary replied severely, thereby indicating that she wished no more questions asked.

"What an ungrateful utterance, as but for Dolly there would be no family, only a widow and orphan !" George protested serio-comically, convinced now of the nature of his wife's scheming.

"But the photograph is for—— I mean, I intend to send it home to mother, to show her how Alan has grown."

"But I have not grown," George remonstrated ; "and I am in it—oh, Mary !"

She flushed a little at her mistake, and told him

that, whether in it or not, he must come, as Alan would not be good without him.

"Oh! now I understand, of course I'll come," he promised, laughing. It amused him so to see his immaculate Mary, since her descent from saint to wife, falling into line with female humanity, and trying to get her own way by manoeuvring.

Before starting, Mary had the satisfaction of seeing Dolly comfortably established in the boudoir. The girl was looking very pretty, but just a little sad and thoughtful.

"We shall be back in time for tea, but don't wait for us," said Mary cheerfully.

"Where are you going?"

"Only to have Alan's photograph taken. It won't take long if he is good," was the reassuring answer.

The girl made no response. Mary moved to the door, lingered there, and then with some hesitation asked if she had read Mr. Hargraves' letter.

"Yes," was the monosyllabic reply.

"Then I may ask him to come to us, I suppose?"

"Certainly!" the girl replied, with an air of indifference.

"Was the letter not nice, dear?" Mary inquired, her conscience taking alarm at Dolly's passive manner.

"Very nice; he generously takes the whole blame on himself, though I was as much in fault as he"; and thereupon tears shone in Dolly's eyes.

"Dear Dolly!" said Mary, kissing her affection-

ately ; "would you like me to stop at home with you ?"

"Thank you, I prefer being alone for a little," was the reply.

Mary was irresolute ; it would never do, she thought, for Mr. Hargraves to find his sweetheart dejected and melancholy. The music of their natures would never rise to harmony were one diffident, the other depressed. Ah, there was a bowl of early white roses on the table, and Dolly loved flowers, and white was typical of purity and of first love. Mary chose several opening buds and placed them artistically in Dolly's sombre tea-gown.

"There," she said, admiring the effect, "that relieves the prevailing black, and makes you look such a sweet, innocent lamb."

The girl permitted her, and smiling with rare gentleness, said, "A lamb decked out for sacrifice, I suppose."

"What can she mean ?" thought Mary. "Is it possible that she guesses ?" And then with a sigh the detected schemer crept away rather guiltily. She had not been straightforward, she felt, and she hated deceit ; and unless her scheme succeeded, her interference might only make poor Dolly miserable : but if it turned out as she hoped, Dolly and Mr. Hargraves would soon be happy, and George would not only admit he had a clever wife, but the cleverest wife in all the world.

Chapter XXXI

MAN AND MAID

LEFT to herself, Dolly rearranged the flowers in her dress. They did throw up the pearl-like delicacy of her complexion ; and why should she not look her best when Jack Hargraves came, though he was nothing to her now ?

She next took out his letter from her pocket and re-read it carefully. It was humble to abjectness. He acknowledged that the quarrel was entirely his fault, due to his selfish, exacting temper ; he had gone away precipitately, convinced that she did not care for him, and preferred flirting with the handsome curate to his company. He had sailed next day for the Cape ; and on the voyage had gambled freely, seeking thereby to drown care and learn to forget. He had been lucky, and won a number of shares in some recently closed gold mines in the Rand. On arrival at the Cape, he had learnt that the mines were being again worked, and now promised to yield rich returns. Before starting for Johannesburg, he had telegraphed home to inquire where she was, but received the reply that she had suddenly gone abroad—to India, it was said ; then for several

months the gold-fever gripped him, and he had laid the foundations of a large fortune. Afterwards he had seen an extract from *The Pioneer* of Allahabad in the Johannesburg *Mining News*, describing her heroism in saving Colonel Fitzhugh's life from the dagger of a fanatic. He at once began to put his affairs in order as well as he could, and having done so, took ship for Bombay. He would have wired thence, but sensitiveness deterred him—she might have forgotten him, and he did not like to run the risk of some humiliating reply, or none at all. Besides, he was hurried. At Delhi he read of her second act of self-devotion, and of her dangerous wound, and would have reached Mankiala a fortnight or more earlier, but was struck down by an attack of malarial fever, which prostrated him and kept him light-headed for days. He had behaved badly, he knew, but threw himself on her mercy, implored her forgiveness, and besought her to give him an opportunity to prove his repentance, and gradually recover her esteem.

Dolly recognised that it was a frank, ingenuous letter, but she felt that it lacked something; it did not satisfy her. He had lightly left her, and lightly—for what was gold to her love?—stayed away. She was originally, perhaps, as much to blame as he was; but then she was a mere girl, ignorant of life, whilst he was a man who knew the world. Well, she would forgive him; but more than that she could not do. It was his desertion of her that had wrecked her life. Now what remained but that she should tread her solitary way, and never

know the love of a husband or the joy of motherhood?

She had just arrived at this dismal conclusion when she became aware that the door of the little boudoir had been opened, and that Jack Hargraves was in the room.

Turning to him, she said, in a quiet, level voice, void of all emotion, "I was expecting you, though my cousin did not know that I had discovered her little plot."

Her composure disconcerted him; his nerves were at tension. He had been ready to throw himself at her feet, and humbly cry, "I have sinned, but forgive me, and love me again," but she had received him as she might a mere friend who had been away a day or two only. Evidently she had ceased to care for him. He advanced with checked ardour, shook hands with her in ordinary fashion, and clumsily accounted for his presumption in entering as he had, by saying that Mrs. Fitzhugh had invited him to tea in her boudoir, but had not hinted that he should find her cousin there.

"I understand," was the calm reply; "she played a little trick on us both, as she thought, for our mutual good."

"Are you angry about it,—Dolly?" he asked, hesitating before he called her by the old, familiar name.

"No, not at all, but I hate scheming," said the girl.

"Have you been reading my letter?" he asked, pointing to it in her lap.

"Yes," she said, regarding him steadily; "we'll speak of it presently. I am noting the changes in you just now."

She saw, with pain, how careworn and broken in health he appeared, and thought what a genial, high-coloured "boy" he had been at home, when they had become, as they supposed, indispensable to each other. How unbounded had been his self-confidence! And now he was a pale, spare, rather refined-looking, middle-aged sort of person, oppressed with a diffident self-consciousness, which detracted from his otherwise easy bearing.

"You are altered, Jack," she announced with judicial brevity, when she had finished her scrutiny. "Though you look ill, and forty at least, you are improved."

"Improved!" he exclaimed bitterly; "I know that anxiety and sickness, and the wear and tear of life in South Africa, have put ten years on to me."

"I suppose the gold fever took it out of you more than the malarial fever," Dolly cruelly remarked, in a low, reflective tone, unable to resist giving him a clue to the impression his letter had made on her.

"I think it did," he admitted ingenuously. "Gold speculation is the worst of all fevers."

"You preferred gold to me," dropped from Dolly's lips slowly, each word ringing as a death-knell to his hopes.

"I plunged into speculation," he cried, in desperation, "to forget you, Dolly; not because I had ceased to care for you. Won't you believe me?"

"I do, in a way. Still, you made me a negligible object; not your life. I could wait; that was your conclusion," was her verdict; and he had to accept it, for he knew it was true.

"Will you forgive me?" he implored.

"I do so, unreservedly; for I, too, was to blame—at first."

"May I hope that you will care for me some day again, as you used to?" he pleaded; adding, "I have now only one object in life, and that is to make you my wife."

"You have lived and aged in a gold fever," said Dolly deliberately; "I, too, have lived, but in a woman's fever, if I may call it so. I could not marry you unless I loved you."

"And you don't?"

"No. How could I—in the way you wish, at least? I like you as a friend—a brother."

"So be it," he acquiesced with a sigh, wisely making the best of her admission of sisterly affection for him.

After a pause, he announced, "In future I shall serve you as a loving brother; but remember, I shall always hope."

"I cannot prevent that, Jack, can I?" she asked, with a flash of her old brightness; and before he could think of an answer, she continued, throwing off her judicial air, "It is a bargain; we shall be good pals, I daresay."

Dolly's change of manner was due to her hatred of scenes, and to the fact that she considered Jack had behaved admirably, and proved himself emi-

nently sensible ; if he would only continue so, their relations might be really pleasant. But he misunderstood her. Mistaking her words and animation for a revival of sentimental feeling for himself, he asked deferentially, but yet with rising assurance,—

“ May I use a returned brother’s privilege, and kiss you, Dolly ? ”

“ No—no ! never that ! ” cried the girl energetically, shuddering at the very idea. “ If you ever propose such a thing again, I shall hate you, and disown you as a brother even.”

“ I shall not offend again,” he said, with sorrowful humility. “ In future I shall be both servant and brother, and nothing more.”

After that the two had a sociable tea together, and Jack even ventured to banter and flatter the tea-giver. He declared she had never looked so lovely as she then did. Suffering had blanched her a little, but that fact made her all the more interesting. She was now one of England’s heroic women ; she had nearly attained martyrdom, and her *proxime accessit* had etherealized her. He would be sorry when she recovered her health, for then the air of pensive melancholy and the delicate pallor, which so became her, would be replaced by her old look of intense enjoyment of mere existence. It was that which had charmed him at home, but now that he appeared, as she had observed, “ forty, at least,” he preferred her as she was to the saucy, inconsequent Dolly of old days.

Dolly listened, and was amused, but warned him

neither to pay her compliments nor chaff her in future,—particularly before her cousins,—as their relations as brother and sister were to be of the matter-of-fact order ; and as to being ethereal or angelic, she would do her best to get strong quickly, as she preferred play and naughtiness to goody-goodness any day.

" I'll watch your progress to—naughtiness, and clear off in time, when I cannot stand it any longer," Jack answered with mock seriousness, congratulating himself that they were now getting on famously together.

His happiness was short, for just then the Fitz-hughs returned, and Mary, in a flutter of hopeful apprehension, at once went to her boudoir. She found them chatting together like old friends, but perceived at a glance that Dolly, at least, was not a bit in love.

" My brother, Mr. Hargraves ; I don't think you have met him before," said Dolly, with much gravity, by way of introduction.

Mary was puzzled for an instant over the relationship ; but presently discovering what the term was intended to convey, accepted the situation, and joined in the small-talk of the tea-table.

" Where is George ? " Dolly asked abruptly, after taking no part in the conversation for some time.

" I told him we should send for him when he was wanted, dear," Mary replied, with more frankness than tact.

" He is always wanted," rejoined Dolly, with a show of impatience.

Her new brother had been watching her closely since Mrs. Fitzhugh came in, and his pale cheek flushed slightly as he realized that Dolly's manifest boredom was not due to fatigue, but to the absence of Colonel Fitzhugh.

"I'll tell him he is to come at once," he said, rising with a sigh. He had his *rôle* as obedient servant to fulfil, yet it was hard to call in his rival, as he already was inclined to regard his host.

When George joined them, he glanced inquiringly at Dolly; and, to Mr. Hargraves' jealous observation, they appeared to exchange a look of mutual tenderness, for which he would have gladly given up his gold-mine shares in the Rand.

"Well, George," said Dolly, after a little badinage, "are you surprised that the strange caller of this morning turns out to be my long-lost brother?"

"Delighted to hear you vouch for the relationship," replied George enigmatically.

"If you love me, love my brother," commanded Dolly.

"You hear that, Hargraves," said George, laughing; "you now know the footing you are on."

The new brother bowed, thinking to himself, "How she does advertise this absurd relationship! There is no mistaking her meaning: I am to be flunkey and dependent—pick up crumbs now and then—and she is to flirt with the hero of the Council Rock."

Shortly afterwards Miss Maynard appeared and announced that her charge had been sitting up long enough and must come.

"Who will help me to bed?" asked Dolly plaintively, with a show of judicial impartiality.

"Miss Maynard or I, of course," Mary replied, preparing to rise; but George anticipated her and sprang to Dolly's side, whilst Mr. Hargraves was moving towards her irresolutely.

Seeing himself forestalled, he stood by her chair and watched her as jealously as if he were already her husband, and not simply a brother *faineant*.

Dolly looked from one to other of the rivals in pretended perplexity. Had she wished to preserve the peace, her exit ought to have been on Nurse Maynard's arm; but the wayward invalid required a man's help, and was determined to have the man she preferred. Mary's speech had annoyed her. What business had Mary to attempt dictation? and why had she tricked Jack and herself into that *tête-à-tête*?

Dolly glanced appealingly to Mary, as much as to say, "You see, I can't help myself, I must choose one of these men," and then following her inclination, gave a hand to George.

He escorted the invalid out of the room in triumph, and at her bedroom door consigned her to Nurse Maynard, but not before Dolly had thanked him, and whispered, "You remember our conversation; I am on your right side to-night, but the Gorgon protects me. Good-night."

He hurried back to his wife's boudoir elated and almost reckless. Mary received him a little coldly; Mr. Hargraves was sitting in a corner with a book in his hand, and did not look up.

"You have not been long, dear," said Mary with an effort to make the best of it.

"No; I made Dolly over in the passage to the Gorgon," he replied innocently, as if he were referring to a baby and her nurse.

"The Gorgon, George!"

"Miss Maynard, I mean. We—that is, Dolly and I—call her the Gorgon sometimes for fun, as she warns off intruders and guards her treasure so jealously."

Mary laughed feebly. She felt her plans had gone wrong, and suspected that Dolly had discovered them, and had used George as a means of asserting her independence.

There was an awkward pause, which Mary ended by declaring it was time for her to get ready for dinner.

When she had gone, Colonel Fitzhugh lit a cigarette, and invited his guest to join in a whiff before dinner. Instead of responding, Mr. Har-graves rose, grimly silent, and left the room.

He had been nursing and fighting his temper for some time, and had prudently resolved not to quarrel with his host, for that would be to lose Dolly; but he felt that the man's proprietary ways with the girl and self-satisfied superiority were intolerable.

Meanwhile, in careless indifference to the feelings he had roused, George Fitzhugh puffed lazily on, too pleased with his victory to bestow another thought on the disconsolate lover.

Chapter XXXII

A CHANGE OF AIR

NOSTALGIA is a common complaint with Anglo-Indians, and each run home intensifies the disease. The Residency party were sufferers, and had, as we have seen, decided to undergo the cure as soon as the malady had declared itself. How to cover the ninety miles between Mankiala and the nearest railway station was the difficulty. Usually the journey was done by *tonga* in ten or twelve hours of continuous driving, but Dolly was not yet strong enough to endure such a rough mode of conveyance. Colonel Fitzhugh decided that they should travel by easy stages in his landau.

Nature was smiling, but man mourning, when early in April they started for home. When Dolly rose that morning and gazed outwards upon the mystery of the daily miracle—the appreciation of light—the contrast between her position now and five months before was vividly present to her.

Then she was a lone, jilted, heart-sick girl, being bumped and jolted for a long, long day over that

wearisome link between civilization and savagery in what is called a "special." Now she was a world-famous personage, decorated with the Order of the Crown of India, the possessor of an auto-graph letter from her Queen-Empress, her picture in every illustrated paper, the pride of all English women, and the beloved of her friends in Mankiala, to say nothing of Colonel Fitzhugh, her own property, Jack Hargraves, her devoted brother and servant, and others.

Yes, Nature was rejoicing and man grieving on that warm spring morning, as the Fitzhugh party stood in the verandah saying good-bye to their friends.

Overhead the grey vault was still studded by rare stars, paling under the advancing light of day, the air was sweet and fragrant from the scent of ripening crops and opening flowers, and the early lark was carolling heavenward, surprising the stillness of awakening day with gladsome music ; the breeze of dawn was cool, causing the close blades of level corn to rustle gratefully, and bend their food-weighted heads as if in quick-succeeding waves of obeisance and regretful adieu to those who were forsaking the fair valley for the fairer fields of old England.

Nature's mood was, as always, concentrated on the present alone. To-day she was revelling in the lusty growth of spring, forgetful of winter's cold and winter's storms, forgetful, too, that, after a short plenty-producing spring, the heats and droughts of the hot weather would burn and dry up all vegeta-

tion, and change the beautiful valley into an abomination of dusty lifelessness. But man's mood this morning was more than usually thoughtful, oppressed by the pathos of perpetual change, which so rends the heart in the land of regrets. The whole station had turned out to wish God-speed and a pleasant holiday to the homeward bound.

Outside, about the lawn of the Residency, was a group of sorrowing servants, a few doubtless sad from genuine attachment for one or other of those departing, but most of them troubled only for their own future, and the loss of comfortable employment under a liberal paymaster.

Old Jiwan was there, sobbing loudly from his breaking heart ; the fat Ayah was there, now wiping her eyes with the back of one dirty hand, now turning for comfort to what she held in the other —her soothing hubble-bubble ; and there, too, were the syces, each standing by his horse, confident that Miss Dolly *Sahib's* last looks would be turned to the animals she loved so dearly. Syces and horses—had the latter known it—were happy, for Colonel Fitzhugh was faithful to his dumb friends, and was leaving them to the care of young Lorimer, who was to act as Resident for the summer as a reward for his late services.

As the landau approached, drawn by four artillery horses, postillioned by two R.A. subalterns and preceded by outriders in the persons of young Tombs, V.C., and Spottiswoode, D.S.O., the last good-byes were begun amongst the group in the verandah. A few minutes afterwards Margaret,

the nurse, leading Alan, got into the carriage, followed by Mary, whose tear-filled eyes brightened as she took her boy on her lap and whispered—“But Muddy has you.”

“Then don’t cry, Muddy, for baby won’t leave you,” said Alan protectingly, wondering what all the fuss was about.

Dolly’s good-byes were more prolonged and more serious than Mary’s, for all her lovers—at least, those who had declared their feelings—were there, and each expected private audience.

The dear old General blessed her, and asked her to promise to let him know in time should she ever decide to make any man happy. Dolly feared she was never likely to do that—for long, at least—as she was full of original sin; but should she decide to make any man unhappy, if there was time, Sir Atwell should hear all about it, including the name of the soon-to-be-miserable man.

“Content, Miss Dolly,” he announced bravely, though his voice was broken. “As I can’t be the man myself, I should like to be best man, even if I have to travel for a month, eh?”

“You are always best friend to me, Sir Atwell,” responded Dolly, much inclined to throw her arms about his neck and treat him filially.

The spectacled Lorimer was the next who claimed her exclusive attention. Being of a business mind, his adieu was soon over. All he wanted was that should Miss Dolly ever visit Scotland she would inform his mother, as the old lady was anxious to meet her.

"What can she know about me?" asked the girl wonderingly.

"Much ; my letters were always full of you, and besides, you are famous—a celebrity—now," was the reply, which was accompanied by a self-conscious blush.

"I'll write to your mother as soon as I get home. I am sure I shall like her," she promised readily, much touched by the boy's attachment and simple trust.

The Rev. Josiah Gubbins' turn came next. He was confidential and mysterious.

"I have taken the vow, Miss Carew, as you may have heard," he announced.

"What! gone over to Rome at last?"

"No, no ; the vow of celibacy," he replied, in lofty correction ; "it puts me out of danger. As I now cannot marry you myself, I hope you will let me marry you to some happier man."

"How can I?" Dolly asked, determined not to be annoyed. "I am not even engaged, and have no intention of becoming so."

"You will get tired of saying 'no' some day, Miss Carew," he prophesied, with offensive familiarity.

"Well, if I do, you shall hear of it."

"Thank you, it is a promise," he murmured, grateful for a small mercy ; and then he hurried away, a lonely man to his lonely quarters, for Dolly was beguiling flesh and blood, and his path was solitary more from necessity than choice.

"Off with you, Fitzhugh, or the sun will be up," urged Sir Atwell, and he gave Dolly his arm, and handed the beguiler of hearts into the landau as if he were her own true knight. Happily Jack Hargraves was not there to raise a question of precedence with the General. In his character of brother and Jack-of-all-work, Mr. Jack had been despatched ahead by *tonga* as *avant courier* to see that breakfast should be ready as soon as they arrived at Nowrang.

When all were packed into the carriage, Sir Atwell led a cheer for Colonel and Mrs. Fitzhugh, and then another for "Miss Carew, the pride of the frontier"; and after that the word was given and they were off—but no, almost immediately a halt was called, for Colonel Fitzhugh's horses had caught sight of him and Dolly, and cocking their ears were whinneying recognition.

"The dears, they want bread," cried Dolly, stretching her hands towards them.

"Here is some," said Lorimer, running up. "I had it ready."

So each animal ate from the hand he or she loved, and after all, the last friend to say good-bye to Dolly—and that, too, in the form of a caress on the hand by the lips—was Kathleen, the Irish-bred mare, famous in Mankiala sporting annals as the flier of the big brook on the opening day of the station hunt.

They were really off at last, and by nine o'clock had reached Nowrang: the house of dismal memory to the forlorn waif of five months ago, a

palace of rest to the universally beloved heroine of to-day.

Jack Hargraves was waiting for them. He lifted Alan out carefully, gave a helping hand to Mary, but had the happiness of feeling the whole light weight of Dolly on his arm as he supported her to the ground, and escorted her into the bungalow.

After breakfast the two R.A. postillions and the outriders, Tombs and Spottiswoode, said good-bye, and started on their return to the station. They would have gladly remained the night, and accompanied the travellers a stage or two farther, but Government bungalows are always economically small, and this one could, as it was, with difficulty accommodate the Fitzhugh party.

* * * * *

In due course the travellers reached home, and descended from the position of distinguished passengers on board the P. & O.'s latest addition to their fleet, the *Punjab*, to Nos. 520 to 526 in the vast London caravanserai which received them.

As the tired voyagers sat round a small table on the night of their arrival in the gilded dining-room of their gigantic hotel, Dolly, who had rather enjoyed her late kingdom, though it was but floating iron, remarked plaintively that at last they were nobodies again.

"Do you want to rule town as you did the *Punjab*?" asked her lover, a little impatient over his long eclipse.

"Hardly, Jack ; it's the season, you know, and

I must get a few frocks first," laughed the girl saucily.

"Well, town is a little bigger than Mankiala or the P. & O.'s leviathan," George admitted.

"It's a maelstrom, and we are lost in it," remarked Mary, who disliked cities—knowing nothing of them as yet, but loving the peace and quiet of her Cornish home.

"Let us enjoy the whirlpool all the same for a week or two, as we are here. A plunge into the vortex will make us appreciate the country all the better afterwards," said George, in a way that amounted to a decision, for he was determined that his little girl should see something of the sights of London before she went north to her almost bed-ridden old father.

Dolly turned gratefully to her intercessor, and caught him yawning. The example was catching. They all wanted a long rest after the tossing they had endured coming up Channel, so in a little the party broke up.

Next morning they reassembled at breakfast, Mary sweet and gracious, Dolly blooming, the two men fit and hungry, and the talk was all about the shops, and the theatres, and where they should dine and so forth. After breakfast the ladies, escorted by Jack, went shopping, whilst George mooned off to the India Office and his Club.

For two or three days they revelled in their freedom and insignificance. They were strangers—nobodies,—and Dolly's conversation was almost

Bohemian ; she was seeing everything, from the opera to the latest Lion Comique at the "Empire." Then one wet morning several fashionably dressed ladies called successively on "Miss Carew," and, to Dolly's amusement, each asked her many questions about her frontier experiences, and each was remarkably well informed about Mankiala affairs. Dolly was innocently communicative, and fought her battles over again and glorified George for his Council-Rock achievement. When at luncheon-time she told him about her callers he laughed knowingly, and said he had been similarly honoured at his Club.

"What, by ladies?" asked Dolly.

"No ; by men. But I discovered what their object was, and I don't think any of them will make a dozen lines of 'copy' out of me."

"What can you mean?" cried Dolly in distress, suspecting that she had been victimized in some way.

"Why, that we have both been interviewed for Press purposes," replied George.

"But my callers were ladies—one was the Countess of Cargen."

"Yes ; and one of mine was a famous Major-General, a K.C.B. with a dozen medals and stars ; and another was a Duke's son."

"What will happen next?" inquired Dolly.

"Oh, nothing serious ; you will be in some of the evening papers, and I expect in *The Times* in the morning. Lady Cargen interviews for the *Thunderer*.

"I said nothing that was not true. Will anything more happen?"

"Yes; you will be lionized by society, I expect," laughed George.

"And you?"

"Well, if you told big enough fibs about me, society may ask me to roar sometimes also."

"I think I shall like it," was Dolly's conclusion.
"I shall have some frocks by Tuesday."

Jack Hargraves, who had heard all the conversation, looked gloomy and moved away—his innings seemed farther off than ever. When Dolly had gone to her room, Colonel Fitzhugh joined the despondent lover, and told him not to grudge the girl her fling, she would soon tire of the racket and hollowness of London life in the season, and then a reaction would come, and he would be near her in Yorkshire for a couple of months, at least.

"Perhaps; but she will have the whole town at her feet, and fascinate some personage."

"Stuff, man! Dolly has sense, and you are as good as any of them, so don't get into the blues, but laugh and chaff with the best of them."

Colonel Fitzhugh's expectations were more than realized, for Dolly and he not only roared in London, but, by command, both of them, including Mrs. Fitzhugh, went to Windsor and lunched with Her Gracious Majesty, and returned charmed with their reception and astonished at Her Majesty's knowledge of Indian, and particularly Mankiala, affairs.

The Fitzhugh party—Jack Hargraves excepted—were soon established favourites in town, and if adulation could have spoilt Dolly, by the end of June she would have been an intolerable young woman. Happily she was country-bred and a child of freedom, and long before the season was over the monotony and constraint of the social functions in which she shone as a bright, particular star began to bore her.

The unnatural life which they were leading had, however, charms for Mary. Being musical, she loved operas and concerts ; being tall, stately, beautiful, and the wife of her "noble George", she enjoyed the distinction with which the world treated them. Her quiet, dignified manner enabled her to conserve her energy, whereas Dolly's mercurial temperament tended to exhaust hers. Both were loadstars for the men, but Dolly sparkled and gave out heat, whilst Mary shone, steadily absorbing heat, yet never warm. The former was a self-consuming comet, the latter a cold, chaste moon.

June was a rainy month, but July opened gloriously with bright, sunny weather. One brilliant morning Dolly looked out of window and saw before her the dull narrow street, with its hurrying crowds, and above her the blue sky, obscured by the dust and haze of the sheddings of four concentrated millions of human beings with their appanages of necessities and luxuries, fires giving forth smoke, carts, carriages, horses, and so forth. After studying through the window man

within walls in front of her, and the glimpse of God above her, the girl turned discontentedly to Jack, and was struck by the weary sadness in his faithful eyes and the leaden hue of his lately voyage-freshened complexion.

Impulsively she gave him her hand and announced, "It is a sin to waste weather like this amidst bricks and mortar, and the conventions of town-existence. I am tired of it all."

"So am I," echoed the melancholy Jack. "Think of what we are missing. Here we are prisoners in an overcrowded jail, with a beastly atmosphere about us, but in a few hours we might have freedom amidst lovely scenery, dressing as we please and doing what we like."

"And the rides, and the cycling excursions, and the bathing," continued Dolly, with enthusiasm.

"And a trip round Scotland in my yacht," insinuated Jack, for now that he was a budding millionaire he possessed a steam yacht.

"Very likely," laughed the girl, flushing; "but I should require a chaperon, a real Gorgon this time, twice as strict as Miss Maynard. No, thank you, sir; I prefer independence on dry land at present."

"But surely as brother and sister——" he began.

"Delightful in theory, but the relationship would hardly be recognised by the inquisitive 'unco guid' north of the Tweed," announced Dolly decisively.

"Well, there is one way," hinted Jack, emboldened by her responsiveness.

"You are forgetting our agreement," said the

girl gently but firmly, whereupon her long-enduring lover suffered eclipse for a time.

At breakfast Dolly surprised her cousins, and even Jack, by informing them that she had had enough of town, and was going home under Jack's escort.

"But, dear, your engagements—you cannot break them," Mary objected.

"Engagements only continue during the mutual pleasure of the contracting parties," put in George slyly.

"Then mine are off," proclaimed Dolly.

"What, all of them?" queried George mischievously, for of late he had been hinting that she must have an understanding with Jack, as she was never with him.

Dolly deigned no reply, but began to discuss trains with her "brother," and before the meal was finished the break-up of the Fitzhugh party was arranged. Dolly, with Jack in attendance, was to start north to her father's, whilst the Fitzhughs were to visit uncle George in Cornwall.

The parting between the two ladies was sisterly and affectionate. Dolly's sorrow was genuine and unalloyed, Mary's solaced with the satisfaction that now she would have George all to herself.

To Mrs. Fitzhugh's disappointment, her exclusive possession of the doubly beloved was delayed for an hour or two, for at the last he arranged that Jack, with the luggage, should go off by himself to the Euston station in a four-wheeler, whilst he followed later with Dolly in the

brougham. She had apparently expected some such manœuvre on his part, for as her "brother" was preparing to start, she gave him a short whispered command.

Alone together for the last time for a month or more after nearly nine months of close friendship, which began with passion and ended, on Dolly's part at least, in *camaraderie* only, the strong man broke down. He held her dear hand in his—insisting on her taking off her glove—and sobbed as if he were losing her for ever. She said little and seemed almost unmoved. Her face showed distress, rather than tender regret, at their impending separation. Evidently her heart was not rent and bleeding as his was.

Many thoughts rushed through her mind. She wondered why she could not feel just a little as George did. Was it that Jack was becoming indispensable to her? or was she angry—angry because of something confided to her that morning by Mary—a something which was making Mary happy? or had the distractions of London and her enlarged knowledge of man made her heartless? So the wayward little heroine of Mankiala, fearful that her womanliness had become blunted, pondered these perplexities in her heart, whilst George shook and sobbed beside her.

Presently she turned her face commiseratingly towards him, and said, "George dear, it is only for a little. I did not know you still cared for me like this."

"Are you going to marry Jack?" he asked hoarsely. "I wish it, though I can't bear losing you."

"No," she replied gently; "I have no such intention."

"He is a good fellow, and would make you a good husband," announced George sententiously, inwardly relieved by her reply.

"I know it, but remember I have lived and loved, and, what is more, have outlived love, I think;" and she sighed and thought she felt an awakening of sentiment for the man beside her.

"Had your romance and it's over," he echoed drearily, not perceiving the depth of her meaning.

"Sown my wild oats, you had better say at once," remarked Dolly, recoiling from his shallowness.

"You mean I was the wild oats? Oh, Dolly!" exclaimed the stupid man.

There was silence between them, each thinking the other unfeeling. Presently George, remembering that their last minute together had come, said imploringly, "You will write often, won't you?"

"Yes, of course; and when Mary sends for me"—and here a subtle ghost of a smile stole over her—"I'll come at once, at any time."

They were now nearing the station. She withdrew her hand from his.

"Good-bye, little one," he said. "Remember I am yours till death, and if ever you wire or write me one word, 'Come,' I shall come."

"Thank you, dear, I'll remember. Please don't think me hard. I am not. I cannot explain my feelings to myself, I fear. I am a selfish and wicked girl, after all."

"Never that," said George with emphasis, guessing perhaps what was passing in her mind.

"Ah, here we are!" cried Dolly, as they entered the station gates at a walk. "Now pull yourself together and be a man, for Jack is waiting there."

The brougham drew up, and Jack quickly handed Dolly out, shut the door and said to the coachman, "Home at once, or Colonel Fitzhugh will miss his train." Then followed a waving of hands from Dolly and Jack to the still unmanned face regarding them from the window of the carriage.

As it turned, George let down the glass, thrust his head out, and shouted "Good-bye again. God bless you both."

On his way back to his hotel he recovered his composure, and almost laughed over the brilliant way in which innocent-wicked Dolly had out-generalled him. She had met his manœuvre for an unobserved farewell by giving Jack the hurried commands, which he had carried out to the letter, and had thus avoided the awkwardness of a public good-bye on the platform, clever little girl !

Chapter XXXIII

WHAT OFTEN HAPPENS

EIGHTEEN months have passed since that parting at the Euston Station between George and Dolly. He is now Colonel Sir George Fitzhugh, V.C., K.C.B., of Ashley Grange, Cornwall, and she, as the bride of Jack Hargraves, is honey-mooning in sunny seas in his yacht, the *Mankiala*.

How these changes came about may perhaps be briefly narrated, for they link the incidents which happened in the cold weather of the story, in that beautiful valley on the wild North-West Frontier of India, with the present positions and probable futures of the three leading characters in this story.

When Colonel Fitzhugh came home on furlough he intended to return to duty in the following December, but instead took two short extensions of leave and then retired from the service. His father was carried off by influenza early in the winter, and soon after that misfortune his boy Alan ceased to be the only adorable one in his mother's eyes. The new infant was a daughter,

and was, of course, christened Dorothea Mary. Equally, of course, our Dolly stood god-mother, and was present at the christening. These occurrences caused George to put off his return to India for some months. Then in February, when for the third time he was about to return to duty, his bachelor uncle, the owner of Ashley Grange, passed away, and George succeeded to the family estate. His V.C. and K.C.B. had then only recently been conferred on him, and were due more to the insistence of public opinion at home than to the spontaneous action of the Government of India.

Though a V.C. is open "for valour" to all British-born servants of Her Majesty, of whatever rank and profession, as a rule the decoration is rarely bestowed on senior men. Now, no one had ever thought of suggesting Colonel Fitzhugh's name for such a distinction until the announcement in the *London Gazette* of young Tombs' appointment to the order. At the time Parliament was not sitting, and neither war, strike, political controversy, nor interesting murder even was occupying public attention. As a consequence, the London dailies were unusually dull, and leader-writers and "our own correspondents" were at their wits' ends for material.

On the appearance of the *Gazette* notification which proclaimed the heroism of young Tombs, *The Times*, *Morning Post*, and several other great dailies, published detailed accounts of the fight at the Council Rock. Commenting on the far-reaching consequences of the achievement, *The*

Times pointed out that if Lieutenant Tombs deserved his V.C., the man who conceived and led the "forlorn hope" equally merited the distinction. The society weeklies, all, already favourably inclined towards Colonel and Mrs. Fitzhugh, took up the gallant Colonel's cause, and drew attention to the fact that though his "raid," as his deed of arms was officially termed, had saved the Indian Exchequer quite a million sterling, and the country many valuable lives, Colonel Fitzhugh had received no recognition whatsoever for services which would be cheap with a peerage.

Public opinion was at once interested. *Truth* published startling revelations about the abuse of patronage exercised by certain high officials, and boldly denounced the Government of India and the War Office. Colonel Fitzhugh was a mere Indian Staff Corps man, and consequently had no friends in high places; he had saved Government from an expensive war—true—but in so doing he had disappointed many interests, therefore he was to be punished, and go unlettered and unhonoured to his grave. Would the British nation permit such injustice? The question excited much discussion on a number of issues, the most pertinent of which was, perhaps, that as technically Colonel Fitzhugh had committed an offence by waging war on his own account without authority, the Government would create a mischievous precedent were that offence rewarded.

That branch of the subject interested lawyers and politicians. The V.C. branch agitated military

men. All the old questions were revived—who should be eligible for the decoration? for what acts should it be awarded? and on whom decision should depend? *The Daily Telegraph* opened its columns for some weeks to letters on “How I won my V.C.” “Why I missed a V.C.” etc., etc.

Thus a curt notification in the *London Gazette* gave strong meat and improved circulation to an anaemic Press, and finally induced Government, at the risk of creating an inconvenient precedent, to recognise, not only Colonel Fitzhugh’s valour, but his political services as well.

Being now V.C., K.C.B., and a man of wealth and position, with an *entrée* into the best houses in town and country, he resigned a service in which scores of better men than he spend the active thirty-five years of their lives, and retire with no other satisfaction than the copy-book consciousness that virtue is its own reward.

But all this time we are forgetting Dolly, the one wholly lovable character in this story.

What she told Colonel Fitzhugh in his brougham was perfectly true—she had outlived love. Like the silly moth, she had fluttered about fire and singed her pretty wings, and the consequences appeared irremediable. Nor sun, nor distraction, nor country air, nor Jack’s devotion had cured the burn.

Her home was about three miles from Jack’s, and the pair rode, cycled, walked, and even trod the moors together till summer changed to autumn, and yet he made little progress—they were pals,

no more. Winter came, and they hunted and skated together, as frost or thaw prevailed. Then Mary's baby was born, and Dolly, as dearest friend and prospective godmother, sped to the Fitzhughs in far Cornwall, and during her visit, which was prolonged from a fortnight to six weeks, appeared to find George a sufficient substitute for Jack. On her return home the faithful squire met her at the station, honest delight on seeing her again brightening his anxious face. As they shook hands, and exchanged words of greeting, Dolly noticed how careworn his homely features had become, and knowing the cause, her heart went out to him a little, but it was not love.

The months passed and things went on as before. In the summer the Fitzhughs paid Jack a visit, and the reunited party of the Mankiala Residency spent two months lazily summering round Scotland and its islands in Jack's steam-yacht.

It would have been a wholly delightful time, without a care, had it not been fraught with some sadness, for it was painfully evident that, almost indispensable though Jack might be to Dolly, her heart was still untouched, whilst hope deferred was fast aging poor Jack, and killing the remains of youth still in him. Dolly, too, was changed. Though sometimes bright and merry as of yore, she was more often pensive, and now always gentle and considerate. Her absorption in her god-daughter was remarkable. The little lady spent hours daily in her lap, and was never happier than when being dressed, washed, or put to bed by

her. As for Alan, that small entity had taken after his father already—he loved aunty, and was very jealous of poor Jack Hargraves.

Dolly's manner towards her lover was touching and consistent. He was generally in low spirits, and, mind affecting health, was losing weight, and had lately developed a chronic cough, which caused some of his friends misgivings, though there was no consumption in his family. Dolly caught the alarm, and treated him as a careful sister might a delicate brother. In a thousand ways, now that he appeared ill and depressed, she sought to repay his devoted service to herself—and yet—and yet her heart to all seeming was untouched still.

When the fine weather broke in October the Fitzhughs returned to their Cornish home, and Dolly went with them. She was now reserved and restless, and often absent-minded. Before a week had elapsed she announced that she must go home, as she had not heard from Jack since they had separated, and was, in consequence, certain he must be very ill.

As she was starting, Mary kissed the girl with more than her usual tenderness, and said with an air of sympathetic mystery, "Good-bye, dear ; I shall look forward to hearing the best of news soon" ; to which Dolly replied with a colourless "I hope so."

George drove her to the station, some miles distant, and on his return remarked cynically to his wife that as Dolly was now convinced Jack

could not live without her, the innate desire which every good woman had for self-immolation would decide her to marry him.

"But don't you think she cares for him at last?" asked Mary anxiously, for to her union without that volatile foundation called love now appeared unholy.

"Not a bit," said George confidently, with inward satisfaction; "Jack will never cause her pulse to beat over regulation."

"What a materialist you are! Does yours ever quicken now?" asked Mary, with some curiosity.

"It sometimes rises to a fever number, and you know it," he replied, kissing her warmly; and the ardour of his embrace was not displeasing.

A few weeks passed, and then came a telegram from Dolly to George containing the single word "Come." Mary was out paying distant calls at the time, so he looked up his trains, left a note for her, caught the express, and some hours afterwards was in Dolly's presence.

"Dear old George!" she said, "I was sure I could depend on you. I am in a dilemma and want your advice."

"I guessed it was coming at last, so out with it, little one."

"It is this: Jack's doctor tells me he requires the exhilaration of a sunny climate and genial companionship, and ought to spend the winter somewhere on the Mediterranean, and I know he won't go without me; so what am I to do?"

"Go with him, of course."

"But I am not his sister or mother, and people would talk."

"Well, go as his wife."

"But I'm only fond of him. I don't think I love him a bit."

"Never mind. He is only ill from fretting for you. Just do it," urged George, with a noble altruism which surprised himself as much as it did Dolly.

"But he has not asked me to marry him since last time, and he is too frightened of me now to ask again."

"It is leap year," dropped from George comprehensively.

"Then I'll just do it at once, you dear old man!" cried Dolly in glad excitement, for she had been nervous that George's selfishness would prevail; and down she sat and wrote a little note to her despairing lover, and no sooner was it written than she despatched it by a groom on horseback.

George sat watching her. He knew the ways of the house—how old Mr. Carew would creep out of his room at dinner-time, leaning on the arm of the ancient retainer, who was nurse and valet to him; how after dinner he would doze in his chair, wake up and say, "Bless me! I've had forty winks, I declare; never did such a thing in my life before," then toddle off to bed on the arm which had attended to most of his wants for some five years now; and then—and then, thought George—I'll have my last talk.

He was roused from his thoughts by her an-

nouncement, "It's off, George, and I have just a few minutes in which to say good-bye to you."

"Good-bye, Dolly!"

"Yes, for by the time papa goes to bed I shall be sealed to Jack, you know."

He grasped her meaning, and taking her in his arms said sadly, "Then it is good-bye in earnest, dear."

When he had released her, she drew away with a sigh saying, "There, it is over for ever now. Part I. of my life is closed."

"And of George's, too, please God," he responded, believing he meant it.

Just then the dressing-bell sounded, and they went to get ready for dinner, the old gentleman being a martinet of punctuality at the one function of the day at which he appeared. The meal passed pleasantly enough. Mr. Carew was garrulous, George self-complacent from pride in his great renunciation, and Dolly fitfully gay and serious, reflecting the sunshine and cloud within her. After dinner Mr. Carew was helped to his arm-chair in front of the fire in the library, and there, with his silk handkerchief over his head, subsided into somnolence. George smoked and occasionally exchanged remarks with Dolly, whose mood was monosyllabic.

The clock struck nine. Mr. Carew opened his eyes, and drowsily answered some imagined question with the words, "Yes, Dolly has a will of her own." A few minutes elapsed, and then the crunching of gravel under a horse's hoofs was

heard, and shortly afterwards the maid appeared, and handed a note to her mistress.

She opened it hastily, but with a show of deliberation, glanced towards George, smiled, and then her eyes filled with tears.

"Is it all right?" he asked gently.

"It will be in the morning, as soon as I have seen him," she replied.

Then through her tears she read it again. It ran, "God bless you, darling! I am better already, but I cannot accept the sacrifice, though it would be the third time you had saved a man's life. I'll explain in the morning."

She did not tell George the contents—they were too sacred for that—but he intuitively guessed their nature.

"Go to your room, Dolly," he ordered, assuming lordship over her for the last time. "I'll tell your father when he wakes that you felt tired and all that."

"Good-night, George," said Dolly, rising, her heart too full for many words.

"And good-bye, too; I'll be off before you are up. There is a quick train to town at 7 a.m. You will wire Mary the date, won't you?"

"Yes, of course," she replied, with a blush; "but won't you stay and see Jack?"

"No; I should be *de trop* now. He wants you, not me, you know. God guard you always, little girl."

The delicacy of his consideration was genuine, and awoke in her a touch of responsive tenderness.

Without a word she held her face up to him—though she was sealed to Jack now—and that was their parting.

In her room her tears came in a quiet flood. She read and re-read the letter, and was happy at last. Jack's wooing had been long and uncertain, but he had won in the end. She recognised that they were mutually indispensable : her marriage with Jack would be no sacrifice, but a sacrament of love ; she felt for him, not the passion of the senses, which George had roused in her, not the romantic attachment with which her ideal inspires a young girl, but the abiding affection with which faithful devotion and service fills the being of a good woman.

* * * *

Next afternoon Mary received two telegrams, one from George, stating his intention of spending a few days in town before he returned home, the other from Dolly, announcing that Jack and she were engaged, and would be married as soon as arrangements could be completed, he being ordered to the Riviera or Algiers for the winter.

The news, though expected, delighted Mary ; George would now be wholly hers, and Dolly would be happily settled, as a wife, a real Dorothea—"the gift of God" to a good and devoted husband.

THE END.

APPENDIX

Note (1). "He had further 'pacified' the unruly inhabitants of our new acquisition," etc., etc. (page 3).

This, in brief, is the "forward" policy. It means endless expense, endless "little wars," endless abortive attempts at disarming the hitherto independent tribes, and endless impressment for the owners of transport animals in the Punjab. Further, it means locking up thousands of our soldiers in neglectable side-routes, from the forts in which they would all be withdrawn if a serious war or extensive internal trouble occurred. No frontier policy will succeed in India in which the element of cost is not a first consideration. The only possibly useful and successful policy is that we should be strong on the two routes, which we decide to be the best for a rapid advance into Afghanistan, should that necessity ever arise. We are strong on the Quetta-Kandahar line, and we should be strong on the Khyber line; and further, we ought to have left other possible routes alone. The revenues of India cannot afford the constant drain, caused by the maintenance of garrisons in side routes, every post in which would be abandoned or entrusted to faithless "levies" during a big war. Every fort, every sepoy in unnecessary positions beyond our actual border is a constant incitement to fanatical *alias* patriotic risings such as those which have just cost impoverished India several millions sterling.

Note (2). "As a consequence the more timid," etc., etc. (page 117).

The above rumours compare feebly with those credited in the Punjab during the earlier phases of the recent

frontier risings, particularly for a few days before the relief of Chakdara and for the week succeeding the abandonment of the Khyber to the Afridi tribesmen. During those critical or humiliating days, the wildest stories about the collapse of the British power, the mutiny of the Musalman elements in the native army, the sack of Peshawer, and so forth, circulated in Upper India, and were accepted as true even by educated men. As illustrating the confusion of belief existing, I may mention that one morning my English-speaking Munshi informed me with grave satisfaction that 50,000 British troops had sailed from London for Bombay. The readiness with which the native world credited the stories about the collapse of our dominion shows how much its preservation depends on prestige, and how unwise was our surrender of the Khyber to the effervescent Afridis.

Note (3). "Nor any other honourable man" (page 145).

The above is an anachronism, but fairly represents public opinion on our surrender to an Afridi rabble of the Khyber Pass, its forts, block-houses, serai, and road, all made and maintained by ourselves. What happened in August, 1897, was this:—Three thousand Mohmands had raided Shabkadar, near Peshawer, and been defeated and driven back into their hills by 800 of our Sepoys and Indian cavalry. Unrest followed in the Khyber. Captain Barton, commandant of the Khyber Rifles, was then recalled from Landi Kotal, our fortified serai at the Afghanistan end of the pass, to Jamrud at the Peshawer mouth of the pass. His servants and Munshis were left at Landi Kotal, and afterwards massacred. We had a brigade at Jamrud ready to reinforce the weak Khyber garrisons, and some 7,000 troops at Peshawer, a few miles further off. Instead of helping the Khyber Rifles, we deserted them, and one by one the forts and posts in the Pass were captured by some 4,000 to 6,000 Afridi tribesmen, whom our inaction had emboldened into taking action. The news of the loss of the Khyber, whilst 12,000 troops looked idly on at or near its mouth, created unrest in the Punjab, as our own people considered that the *Sarkâr's ikbâl* (prestige) was at an end. The easy success of the malcontent Afridis in the Pass incited, and in a way

forced, their uncommitted brethren and their cousins the Orakzais to rise *en masse*—two small sections excepted—and so brought on the great Tirah expedition of October-March, 1897-98, than which no worse misfortune has befallen India since the Mutiny.

The Orakzais are at best ill-conditioned savages, and have a standing grievance against us because in 1892, we seized part of their country, and dominated their Khánki valley with a chain of forts built along the Samana ridge inside their hills. They therefore were ripe for insurrection.

But the Afridis had no cause of complaint against us, and the majority of them had no wish to be dragged into a quarrel with us. For forty years they had supplied our native army with its best Pathan soldiers, and for twenty years they had faithfully held the Khyber for us, and received in pay and allowances about three lakhs of rupees a year. In addition, about 2,000 of them are serving in our native army, 800 in the Khyber Rifles, and 600 or more are in receipt of military pensions.

All the other frontier tribes believed that we intended to destroy their independence. But the Afridis had no such belief. All their interests lay in their preserving the *status quo* with us. All serving us, with 56 exceptions, have been true to their salt throughout these frontier risings. Had we been as true to them, and supported the Khyber Rifles by throwing supplementary garrisons into the Khyber forts—experts say 2,000 Sepoys and four Maxims would have sufficed—the partial effervescence of fanatics and malcontents must soon have died out, after or without breaking abortively against the walls of Landi Kotal and Ali Masjid. Thus India would have been saved from the costly calamity of this Tirah expedition, and the successfully worked policy of the last twenty years would not have collapsed.

The surrender of the Khyber is defended on legal grounds under the terms of an agreement with the Afridis made in 1881, but the apologists for the course adopted ignore the fact that in the last sixteen years conditions have wholly changed, as we have since 1881 raised the Khyber Rifles to the efficiency of a battalion of Sepoys, employed them on

field service in the Black Mountain, eighty miles from the Khyber, and spent lakhs of rupees on fortifications and road-improvement in the pass.

Note (4). "Public opinion would not stand it" (page 207).

Another anachronism here. A system similar to that described above existed in the Punjab until about 1861, when it was detected by Lieutenant Sandeman, afterwards Sir Robert Sandeman, of Beluchistan fame, then an Assistant-Commissioner in the Peshawer District. The story goes that the Government informer was his own Munshi, and that he put the man in jail and refused to release him until he should be tried for making false reports against British officers. The *exposé* which followed killed a system of espionage which was repugnant to the English character.

Note (5). "So the money has to be found by borrowing" (page 375).

All this is true. In the last ten years there have been as many "little wars" on our N.W. Frontier, and we have just emerged from a series of them, in which about 50,000 troops were employed. On each occasion camels, mules, ponies, donkeys, and sometimes even plough-cattle, *with their owners*, have to be impressed by tens of thousands for transport purposes. The conditions of service are now good; hence, beyond the evils attending the seizure of rustics and their cattle, and the dislocation of village economy which occurs, there is now not much real hardship in impressment. Like Nelson's sailors seized by the press-gang, the Punjabi villagers soon get reconciled to compulsory service, and after the campaign nine out of ten of them return home happy, with a hundred rupees or so saved.

